

THE ARGOSY.

MARCH, 1880.

THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER VII.

COMING TO DINNER.

MISS WINTER sat in her low chair by the window of her sitting-room in the north wing; for though she had abandoned her bed-room in that quarter, she still, on occasion, sat in that. A closed book lay on her lap, her chin was resting on the palm of one hand, and her eyes, to all appearance, were taking in for the thousandth time the features of the well-known scene before her. But in reality she saw nothing of it: her thoughts were elsewhere. This was Tuesday, the day fixed for Edward Conroy to dine at the Hall. How came it that his image—the image of a man whom she had seen but twice in her life—dwelt so persistently in her thoughts? She was vexed and annoyed with herself to find how often her mind went wandering off in a direction where—or so she thought—it had no right to go. She tried her hardest to keep it under control, to fill it with the occupations that had hitherto sufficed for its quiet contentment, but at the first unguarded moment it was away again, to bask in sunshine, as it were, till caught in the very act, and haled ignominiously back.

“Why must I be for ever thinking about this man?” she asked herself petulantly, as she sat this morning by the window, and a warm flush thrilled her even while the question was on her lips. She was ashamed to remember that even at church on Sunday morning she could not get the face of Edward Conroy out of her thoughts. The good Vicar’s sermon had been more prosy and commonplace than usual, and do what she might, Ella could not fix her attention on it. She caught herself half a dozen times calling to mind what Conroy had said on Thursday, and wondering what he

would say on Tuesday. She had no intention of falling in love, either with him or with any other man ; on that point she was firmly resolved. She and Maria Kettle had long ago agreed that they could be of more use in the world, of greater service to the poor, the sick, and the forlorn among their fellow creatures as single women than as married ones ; and Ella, for her part, had no intention of letting any man carry her heart by storm.

Yet, after making all these brave resolutions, here she was, wondering and hesitating as to which dress she should wear, as she had never wondered or hesitated before ; and when the clock struck eleven she caught herself saying, " In six more hours he will be here." Then she jumped up quickly with a gesture of impatience. She was the slave of thoughts over which she seemed to have no control. It was a slavery that to her proud spirit was intolerable. She could not read this morning. Her piano appealed to her in vain. Her crewel work seemed the tamest of tame occupations. She put on her hat and scarf, and, calling to Turco, set off at a quick pace across the park. Perhaps the fresh bracing air that blew over the sand-hills would cool the fever of unrest that was in her veins. Once she said to herself, " I wish he had never come to Heron Dyke ! " But next moment a proud look came into her face and she said, " Why should I fear him more than any other ? "

Ella Winter has hitherto been spoken of as though she were Mr. Denison's niece : she was in reality his grand-niece, being the grand-daughter of an only sister, who had died early in her married life, leaving one son behind her. This son, at the age of twenty-two, married a sister of Mrs. Carlyon, but his wedded life was of brief duration. Captain Winter and his wife both died of fever in the West Indies, leaving behind them Ella, their only child.

Mrs. Carlyon, a widow and childless, would gladly have adopted the orphan niece who came to her under these sad circumstances, but Squire Denison would not hear of such a thing. He had a prior claim to the child, he said, and she must go to him and be brought up under his care. He had no children of his own, and never would have any : Ella was the youngest and last descendant of the elder branch of the family, and Heron Dyke and all that pertained to it should be hers in time to come ; provided always that he, Gilbert Denison, should live to see his seventieth birthday. He had loved his sister Lavinia as much as it was in his nature to love anyone ; and her son, had he lived, would, in the due course of things, have been his heir. But he was dead, leaving behind him only this one poor little girl. To Gilbert Denison it seemed that Providence had dealt very hardly by him in giving him no male heir to inherit the family honours. He himself would have married years ago had he anticipated such a result.

For six hundred years the property had come down from male heir to male heir, but now at last the line of direct succession would

be broken. "If Ella had only been a boy!" he sighed to himself a thousand times: but Ella was that much more pleasing article—except from the heir-at-law point of view—a beautiful young woman, and nothing could make her anything else.

On the confines of the park, just as she was about to turn out of it, Ella met Captain Lennox, who was coming to call on the Squire. It was the first time Ella had seen him since her return from London, for the Captain had been again from home. He had aristocratic relatives, it was understood, in various parts of the kingdom, and was often away on visits to them for weeks together.

"You are looking better than you were that night at Mrs. Carlyon's," he remarked, as they stood talking.

"Am I?" returned Ella, a rosy blush suffusing her face—for the idea somehow struck her that Mr. Conroy's presence in the neighbourhood might be making her look bright.

"Very much so, I think. Mrs. Carlyon was not quite satisfied with your looks then. By-the-way," added the Captain after a pause, "has she recovered her jewels, that were lost that night?"

"No. She is quite in despair. I had a letter from her yesterday. You heard of the loss then, Captain Lennox?"

"I heard of it the following day. Ill news travels fast," he added lightly, noting Ella's look of surprise.

"How did you hear of it? I fancied you left London that day."

"No, the next. I heard of it from young Cleeve. He called on Mrs. Carlyon that morning, and came back in time for me and Bootle to see him off. Cleeve told us of the loss on his way to the station. It was a time of losses, Miss Winter. I lost my purse, and poor Bootle his watch—one he valued—the same night."

"Yes, Freddy told us of it later. He thought you were robbed in the street."

"I know he thought so. I did at first. But our losses were nothing compared with Mrs. Carlyon's jewels," continued Captain Lennox rapidly, as though he would cover his last words. "And the jewel case was found the next day; and the thief must have walked off with the trinkets in his pocket!"

"Just so. And they were worth quite three hundred pounds."

Captain Lennox opened his eyes. "Three hundred pounds! So much as that! I wonder how they were taken? By some light-handed fellow, I suppose, who contrived to find his way upstairs amid the general bustle of the house."

"No, we think not. The servants say it was not well possible for anyone to do that unnoticed; Aunt Gertrude thinks the same. And the servants are all trustworthy. It is a curious matter altogether."

Captain Lennox looked at her. "Surely you cannot suspect any of the guests?"

"It would be uncharitable to do that," was Ella's light answer.

But the keen-witted Captain noticed that she did not deny it more decisively.

"What a pity but the jewels had been safely locked up!" he exclaimed.

"The dressing-room, in which they were, was locked; at least, the key was turned—and who would be likely to intrude into it? Aunt Gertrude remembers that perfectly. She found Philip Cleeve lying on the sofa in her boudoir with a bad head-ache, and she went into the dressing-room to get her smelling-salts, unlocking the door to enter. Whether she relocked it is another matter."

"Did Cleeve notice whether anybody else went in, while he was lying there?"

"He thinks not, but he can't say for certain—we asked him that question the next morning. He fancies that he fell asleep for a few minutes: his head was very bad. Anyway, the jewels are gone, and Aunt Gertrude can get no clue to the thief, so it is hopeless to talk of it," concluded Ella, somewhat wearily. "How is your sister?"

"Quite well, thank you. Why don't you come and see her?"

"I will; I have been very busy since I came home. And tell her, please, that I hope she will come to see me. Good-bye for the present, Captain Lennox: you are going on to my uncle; perhaps you will not be gone when I get back; I shall not be long."

Ella tripped lightly on, Turco striding gravely beside her. Captain Lennox stood for a minute to look after her.

"I wonder," he muttered to himself, stroking his whiskers—a habit of his when he fell into a brown study—"whether it has crossed Mrs. Carlyon's mind to suspect Philip Cleeve?"

After all her vacillation, Ella went down to dinner that evening in a simple white dress. She could hardly have chosen one to suit her better; at least, so thought Mr. Conroy, when he entered the room. The dinner was not homely, as on the first occasion of his dining there; Ella had ordered it otherwise. It was served on some of the grand old family plate, not often brought to light; and the table was decorated with flowers from the Vicar's charming garden.

But what surprised Aaron more than anything else was to see his master dressed, and wearing a white cravat. He went about the house muttering, sotto voce, that there were no fools like old fools, and if these sort of extravagant doings were about to set in at the Hall—soups and fish and foreign kickshaws—it was time old-fashioned attendants went out of it. The Squire, in fact, had so thoroughly inoculated the old man with his own miserly ways, that for Aaron to see an extra shilling spent on what he considered unnecessary waste, was to set him grumbling for a day.

Whether it was that Ella had a secret dread of passing another evening alone with Conroy, or whether her intention was to render

the evening more attractive to him, she had, in any case, asked her uncle to allow her to invite the Vicar and Maria, Lady Cleeve and Philip, and Captain Lennox and his sister, to meet Mr. Conroy at dinner. But here the Squire proved obstinate. Not one of the people named would he invite, or indeed anyone else. "That young artist fellow is welcome to come and take pot-luck with us," he said, "but I'll have none of the rest. And why I asked him, I'm sure I don't know. There was something about him, I suppose, that took my fancy: though what right an invalid man like me has to have fancies, is more than I can tell."

Conroy seemed quite content to find himself the solitary guest. Ella was more reserved and silent than he had hitherto seen her, but he strove to interest her and melt her reserve; and after a time he succeeded in doing so. Once or twice, at first, when she caught herself talking to him with animation, or even questioning him with regard to this or the other, she suddenly subsided into silence, blushing inwardly as she recognised how futile her resolves and intentions had proved themselves to be. Conroy seemed not to notice these abrupt changes, and in a little while Ella would again become interested, again her eyes would sparkle, and eager questions tremble on her lips. Then all at once an inward sting would prick her, her lips would harden into marble firmness and silence. But these alternations of mood could not last for ever; and by-and-by the charm and fascination of the situation proved too much for her. "After this evening I shall probably never see him again," she pleaded to herself, as if arguing with some inward monitor. "What harm can there be if I enjoy these few brief hours?"

Mr. Denison was more than usually silent. Now and then, after dinner, he dozed for a few minutes in his huge leathern chair; and presently, as though he yearned to be alone, he suggested that Conroy and Ella should take a turn in the grounds.

Ella wrapped a fleecy shawl round her white dress and they set out. Traces of sunset splendour still lingered in the western sky, but from minute to minute the dying colours changed and deepened: saffron flecked with gold fading into sea-green, and that into a succession of soft opaline tints and pearly greys edged here and there with delicate amber: while in mid-sky the drowsy wings of darkness were creeping slowly down.

They walked through the dewy twilight glades of the park. Conroy seemed all at once to have lost his speech. Neither of them had much to say, but to both the silence exhaled a subtle sweetness. There are moments when words seem a superfluity—almost an impertinence. To live, to breathe—to feel that beside you is the living, breathing presence of the one supremely loved, is all that you ask for. It is well, perhaps, that such sweetly dangerous moments come so seldom in a lifetime.

They left the park by a wicket, took a winding footway through

the plantation beyond, and reached the sand-hills, where they sat down for a few moments. Before them lay the sea, touched in mid-distance with faint broken bars of silvery light: for by this time the moon had risen, and all the vast spaces of the sky were growing brighter with her presence.

"How this scene will dwell in my memory when I am far away!" exclaimed Conroy at length.

"Are you going far away?" asked Ella, in a low voice.

"I received a letter from head-quarters this morning, bidding me hold myself in readiness to start for Africa at a few hours' notice."

"For Africa! That is indeed a long way off. Why should you be required to go to Africa?"

"The King of Ashantee is growing troublesome. We are likely before long to get from words to blows. War may be declared at any moment."

"And the moment war is declared you must be ready to start?"

"Even so. Wherever I am sent, there I must go."

"Yours is a dangerous vocation, Mr. Conroy. You run many risks."

"A few—not many. As for danger, there is just enough of it to make the life a fascinating one."

"Yes; if I were a man I don't think I could settle down into a quiet country gentleman. I should crave for a wider horizon, for a more adventurous life, for change, for——"

She ended abruptly. Once again her enthusiasm was running away with her. There was a moment's silence, and then she went on, laughing. "But I am content to be as I am, and to leave such wild roving to you gentlemen! And now we must go back to my uncle, or he will wonder what has become of us."

Little was said during the walk back. Despite herself, Ella's heart sank at the thought of Conroy's going so far away. She asked, mentally and impatiently, what it could matter to her where he went. Had she not said twenty times that to-morrow all this would seem like a dream, and that in all likelihood she and Conroy would never meet again? What matter, then, so long as they did not see each other, whether they were separated by five miles or five thousand?

"Body o' me! I thought you were lost," exclaimed the Squire, as they re-entered the room. "Been for a ramble, eh? seen the sea! Fine evening for it. And when do you come down into this part of the country again, Mr. Sketcher?"

"That is more than I can say, sir. My movements are most erratic and uncertain."

"Mr. Conroy thinks it not unlikely he may be sent to Africa—to Ashantee," said Ella, a little ring of pathos in her voice.

"Ah—ah—nothing like plenty of change when you are young. Bad climate though, Ashantee, isn't it. You'll have to be careful

Yellow Jack doesn't lay you by the heels. He's a deuce of a fellow, out there, from all I've heard. Eh?"

"I must take my chance of that, sir, as other people have to do."

"You talk like a lad of spirit. Snap your fingers in the face of Yellow Jack, and ten to one he'll glance at you and pass you by. It's the tremblers he lays hold of first."

"Why should you be chosen, Mr. Conroy, for the posts of danger?" inquired Ella. "Cannot some one else share such duties?"

"Is it not possible that I may prefer such duties to any other? They do not suit everyone. As it happens, they suit me."

"Have you no mother or sister—who may fear your running into unnecessary dangers?"

"I have neither mother nor sister. I have a father: but he lets me do what seems right in my own eyes."

Mr. Denison took what for him was a very cordial leave of Conroy. "If I am alive when you come back," he said, as he held the younger man's hand in his for a moment, "do not forget that there will be a welcome for you at Heron Dyke. If I am not alive—then it won't matter, so far as I am concerned."

Ella took leave of Conroy at the door. Hardly more than a dozen words passed between them. "If you must go to Africa," she said, "I hope you will not run any needless risks."

"I will not. I promise it."

"We shall often think of you," she added, in a low voice.

"And I of you, be you very sure."

Her fingers were resting in his hand. He bent and pressed them to his lips, and—the next moment was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE LILACS.

NULLINGTON was a sleepy little town, standing a mile, or more, from Heron Dyke, and boasted of some seven or eight thousand inhabitants. The extension of the railway to Nullington was supposed to have made a considerable addition to its liveliness and bustle: but that could only be appreciated by those who remembered a still more sleepy state of affairs, when the nearest railway station was twenty miles away, and when the Mermaid coach seemed one of those institutions which must of necessity last for ever.

Nullington stood inland. Of late years a sort of suburb to the old town had sprung up with mushroom rapidity on the verge of the low sandy cliffs that overlooked the sea, to which the name of New Nullington had been given. Already New Nullington possessed terraces of lodging-houses, built to suit the requirements of visitors, and some good houses were springing up year by year. Several

well-to-do families, who liked "the strong sweet air of the North Sea," had taken up their residence there en permanence.

It was a pleasant walk from New Nullington along the footpath by the edge of the cliff, with the wheat-fields on one hand and the sea on the other; when you reached the lighthouse, the cliff began to fall away till it became merged in great reaches of shifting sand, which stretched southward as far as the eye could reach. Here at the junction of cliff and sand was the lifeboat station, while a few hundred yards inland, and partly sheltered from the colder winds by the sloping shoulder of the cliff, stood the little hamlet of Easterby. A few fishermen's cottages, a few labourers' huts—and they were little better than huts—an alehouse or two, a quaint old church which a congregation of fifty people sufficed to fill, and a few better-class houses scattered here and there, made up the whole of Easterby.

Easterby and New Nullington might be taken as the two points of the base of a triangle, with the sea for their background, of which the old town formed the apex. The distance of the latter was very nearly the same from both places. About half-way between Easterby and the old town of Nullington, you came to the lodge which gave access to the grounds and Hall of Heron Dyke.

On the other side of Nullington, on the London road, stood Homedale, a pretty modern-built villa, standing in its own grounds, the residence of Lady Cleeve and her son Philip.

Lady Cleeve had not married until late in life, and Philip was her only child. She had been the second wife of Sir Gunton Cleeve, a baronet of good family but impoverished means. There was a son by the first marriage, who had inherited the title and such small amount of property as came to him by entail. The present Sir Gunton was in the diplomatic service at one of the foreign courts. He and his step-mother were on very good terms. Now and then he wrote her a cheery little note of a dozen lines, and at odd times there came a little present from him, just a token of remembrance, which was as much as could be expected from so poor a man.

Lady Cleeve had brought her husband fifteen thousand pounds in all, the half of which only was settled on herself; and her present income was but three hundred and fifty pounds a year. The house, however, was her own. She kept two women servants, and lived of necessity a plain and unostentatious life; saving ever where she could for Philip's sake. That young gentleman, now two-and-twenty years old, was not yet in a position to earn a guinea for himself; though it was needful that he should dress well and have money to spend, for was he not the second son of Sir Gunton Cleeve?

For the last two years Philip had been in the office of Mr. Tiplady, the one architect of whom Nullington could boast, and who really had an extensive and high-class practice. Mr. Tiplady had known and respected Lady Cleeve for a great number of years; and, being

quite cognisant of her limited means, he had agreed to take Philip for a very small premium, but as yet did not pay him any salary. The opening was not an unpromising one, there being some prospect that Philip might one day succeed to the business, for the architect had neither chick nor child.

Another prospect was also in store for Philip—that he should marry Maria Kettle. The Vicar and Lady Cleeve, old and firm friends, had somehow come to a tacit notion upon the point years ago, when the children were playfellows together; and Philip and Maria understood it perfectly—that they were some day to make a match of it. It was not distasteful to either of them. Philip thought himself in love with Maria; perhaps he was so after a fashion; and there could be little doubt that Maria loved Philip with all her heart. And though she did not see her way clear to leave the parish as long as her father was vicar of it, she did admit to herself in a half-conscious way that if, in the far, very far-off future, she could be brought to change her condition, it would be for Philip Cleeve.

Midway between the old town and the new one, was The Lilacs; the pretty cottage ornée of which Captain Lennox and his sister, Mrs. Ducie, were the present tenants. The cottage was painted a creamy white, and had a verandah covered with trailing plants running round three sides of it. It was shut in from the highroad by a thick privet hedge and several clumps of tall evergreens. Flower borders surrounded the house, in which was shown the perfection of ribbon gardening, and the well-kept lawn was big enough for Badminton or lawn-tennis. There was no view from the cottage beyond its own grounds. It lay rather low, and was perhaps a little too much shut in by trees and greenery: all the same, it was a charming little place.

Here, on a certain evening in September, for the weeks have gone on, a pleasant little party had met to dine. There was the host, Captain Lennox. After him came Lord Camberley, a great magnate of the neighbourhood. The third was our old acquaintance, Mr. Bootle, with his eye-glass and his little fluffy moustache. Last of all came handsome Philip Cleeve, with his brown curly hair and his ever-ready smile. The only lady present was Mrs. Ducie.

Teddy Bootle had run down on a short visit to Nullington, as he often did. He and Philip had found Captain Lennox and Lord Camberley in the billiard-room of the Rose and Crown Hotel—Master Philip being too fond of idling away his hours, and just now it was a very slack time at the office. Lennox at once introduced Mr. Bootle to his lordship, and he condescended to be gracious to the little man, whose income was popularly supposed to be of fabulous extent. Philip he knew to nod to; but the two were not much acquainted. The Captain proposed that they should all go home and dine with him at The Lilacs, and he at once scribbled a note to his sister, Mrs. Ducie, that she might be prepared for their arrival.

Lord Camberley was a good-looking, slim-built, dark-complexioned man of eight-and-twenty. He had a small black moustache, his hair was cropped very short, and he was fond of sport as connected with the race-course. By his father's death a few months ago he had come into a fortune of nine thousand a year. He lived, when in the country, at Camberley Park, a grand old Elizabethan mansion about five miles from Nullington, where his aunt, the Honourable Mrs. Featherstone, kept house for him.

It was at the billiard-table that he and Lennox had first met. A billiard-table is like a sea voyage: it brings people together for a short time on a sort of common level, and acquaintanceships spring up which under other circumstances would never have had an existence. The advantage is that you can drop them again when the game is over, or the voyage at an end: though people do not always care to do that. In the dull little town of Nullington the occasional society of a man like Captain Lennox seemed to Lord Camberley an acquisition not to be despised. They had many tastes and sympathies in common. The Captain was always well posted up in the state of the odds; in fact, he made a little book of his own on most of the big events of the year. There were few better judges of the points of a horse or a dog than he. Then he could be familiar without being presuming: Lord Camberley, who never forgot that he was a lord, hated people who presumed. Lennox, in fact, was a "deuced nice fellow," as he more than once told his aunt. Meanwhile he cultivated his society a good deal: he could always drop him when he grew tired of him, and it was his lordship's way to grow tired of everybody before long.

Five minutes after they had assembled Margaret Ducie entered the room. Lord Camberley had seen her several times previously, but to Bootle and Philip she was a stranger. Her brother introduced them. There was perhaps a shade more cordiality in the greeting she accorded to Bootle than in the one she vouchsafed to Philip. Camberley the cynical, who was looking on, and who prided himself, with or without cause, on his knowledge of the sex, muttered under his breath, "She knows already which is the rich man and which the poor clerk. Lennox must have put her up to that."

Mrs. Ducie was a brunette. She had a great quantity of jet-black silky hair and large black liquid eyes. Her nose was thin, high-bred, and aquiline, and she rarely spoke without smiling. Her figure was tall and somewhat meagre in its outlines; but whether she sat, or stood, or walked, every movement and every pose was instinct with a sort of picturesque and unstudied grace. She dressed very quietly, and when abroad her almost invariable wear was a gown of some plain black material. But about that simple garment there was a style, a fit, a suspicion of something in cut or trimming, in the elaboration of a flounce here or the addition of a furbelow there, that to the observant mind hinted at the latest Parisian audacity and

of secrets which as yet were scarcely whispered beyond Mayfair. The ladies of Nullington and its neighbourhood could only envy and admire and imitate afar off.

Mrs. Ducie was one of those women whose age it is next to impossible to guess correctly. "She's thirty if she's a day," Lord Camberley had said to himself within five minutes of his introduction to her. "She can't possibly be more than three-and-twenty," was Philip Cleeve's verdict to-day. The truth, in all probability, lay somewhere between the two.

Whatever her age might be, Lord Camberley had a great admiration for Mrs. Ducie, but it was after a fashion of his own. He was thoroughly artificial himself, and rustic beauty, or simplicity, eating bread-and-butter in a white frock, had no charms for him. He liked a woman who had seen and studied the world of "men and manners;" and that Mrs. Ducie had travelled much, and seen many phases of life, he was beginning by this time to discover. He was on his guard when he first made her acquaintance, lest he might be walking into a matrimonial trap, artfully baited by herself and her brother, for Lord Camberley was a mark for anxious mothers and daughters: not but that he felt himself quite capable of looking after his own interests on that point. Still, however wide-awake a man may believe himself to be, it is always best to be wary in this crafty world; and very wary he was the first three or four times he visited The Lilacs. He was not long, however, in perceiving that, whatever matrimonial designs Margaret Ducie might or might not have elsewhere, she was without any as far as he was concerned; and from that time he felt at ease in the cottage.

Captain Lennox's little dinners were thoroughly French in style and cookery. They were good without being over elaborate. Camberley's idea was that the pretty widow, despite her white and delicate hands, was oftener in the kitchen than most people imagined. When dinner was over the gentlemen adjourned to the verandah to smoke their cigars and sip their coffee; while in the drawing-room, the French windows of which were open to the garden, lighted only by one shaded lamp, Margaret sat and played in a minor key such softly languishing airs, chiefly from the old masters, as accorded well with the September twilight and the far niente feeling induced by a choice dinner.

Philip Cleeve felt like a man who dreams and is yet awake. Never before had he been in the company of a woman like Mrs. Ducie. There was a seductive witchery about her, such as he had no previous knowledge of. It was not that she took more notice of him than of anyone else; it maybe that she took less; but he fell under the influence of that subtle magnetism, so difficult to define, and yet so very evil in its effects, which some women exercise over some men, perhaps without any wish or intention on their part of doing so. In the case of Philip it was a sort of mental intoxication, delicious and

yet with a hidden pain in it, and with a vague underlying sense of unrest and dissatisfaction for which he was altogether unable to account.

After a time somebody proposed cards—probably it was Camberley—and as no one objected they all went indoors.

“What are we going to play?—whist?” queried Lennox while the servant was arranging the table.

“Nothing so slow as whist, I hope,” said his lordship. “A quiet hand at ‘Nap’ would be more to my taste.”

“How say you, gentlemen? I suppose we all play that vulgar but fascinating game?” said the Captain.

“I know a little of it,” answered Bootle.

“I have only played it once,” said Philip.

“If you have played once, it’s as good as having played it a thousand times,” said Camberley, dogmatically. “I’m not over brilliant at cards myself, but I picked up Napoleon in ten minutes.”

“Shilling points, I suppose?” said Lennox.

Camberley shrugged his shoulders but said nothing, and they all sat down.

There was an arched recess in the room, fitted with an ottoman. It was Mrs. Ducie’s favourite seat. Here she sat now, engaged on some piece of delicate embroidery, looking on, and smiling, and giving utterance to an occasional word or two between the deals, but not interrupting them.

Philip Cleeve, notwithstanding that he was less conversant with the game than his companions, and that the black eyes of Mrs. Ducie would persist in coming between him and his cards—he could see her from where he sat, almost without a turn of his head—was very fortunate in the early part of the evening, carrying all before him. He found himself, at the end of an hour and a half’s play, a winner of close on three sovereigns; which to a narrow pocket seems a considerable sum.

“This is too sleepy!” cried Camberley at last. “Can’t we pile up the agony a bit, eh, Lennox?”

“I’m in your hands,” said the Captain.

“What say you, Mr. Bootle?” queried his lordship. “Shall we turn our shillings into half-crowns? That will afford a little more excitement, eh?”

“Then a little more excitement let us have by all means,” answered good-natured Freddy, who cared not whether he lost or won.

But now Philip’s luck seemed at once to desert him. What with the extra wine he had taken, and the glamour cast over him by the proximity of Mrs. Ducie, his judgment became entirely at fault. In half an hour he had lost back the whole of his earnings; a little later still, his pockets were empty. It is true he only had two sovereigns about him at starting, so that his loss was not a heavy one; but it was quite heavy enough for him. He was hesitating what he should

do next—whether borrow of Bootle or Lennox—when all at once he remembered that he had money about him. In the course of the day he had collected an account amounting to twenty pounds, due to Mr. Tiplady, and it was still in his possession. He felt relieved at once. There was a chance of his winning back what he had lost. With a hand that shook a little he poured out some wine and water at the side table and then sat down to resume his play.

When the clock on the chimney-piece chimed eleven, Lord Camberley threw down his cards, saying he would play no more, and Philip Cleeve found himself with a solitary half-sovereign left in his pocket.

He got up, feeling stunned and giddy, and stepped out through the French window into the verandah. Here he was presently joined by the rest. Lennox thrust a cigar into his hand, and they all lighted up. The night was sultry; but after the warmth of the drawing-room such fresh air as there was seemed welcome to all of them. They went slowly down the main walk of the garden towards the little fish-pond at the end, Camberley and Mrs. Ducie, for she had strolled out too, being a little behind the others.

"I am going to drive my drag to the Agricultural Show at Norwich next Tuesday," said his lordship to her. "Lennox has promised to go. May I ask you if you will honour me with your company on the box seat on the occasion?"

"Who is going besides yourself and Ferdinand?" she rejoined.

"Captain Maudesley, and Pierpoint. Sir John Fenn will probably pack himself inside with his gout."

"But the other ladies—who are they?"

"Um—well, to tell you the truth, I had not thought about asking any other lady."

"Ah! Then, I'm not sure that I should care to go with you, Lord Camberley. Five gentlemen and one lady—that would never do."

"Let me beg of you to reconsider——"

"Pray do nothing of the kind. I would rather not."

"I am awfully sorry," said his lordship in something of a huff. "Confound this cigar! And confound such old-fashioned prudish notions!" he added to himself. "I'd not have thought it of her."

She walked back, after saying a pleasant word or two, and fell into conversation with Philip Cleeve. He seemed distrait. She thought he had taken enough champagne, and felt rather sorry for the young fellow.

"Do you never feel dull, Mrs. Ducie," he asked, "now that you have come to live among the sand-hills?"

"Oh no. The people I have been introduced to here are all very nice and kind; and then I have my ponies, you know; and there's my music, and my box from Mudie's once a month; so that I have not much time for ennui. My tastes are neither very æsthetic nor very elevated, Mr. Cleeve."

"They are at least agreeable ones," answered Philip.

As Philip Cleeve walked home a war of feelings was at work within him, such as he had never experienced before. On the one hand there was the loss of Mr. Tiplady's twenty pounds : which must be made good to-morrow morning. He turned hot and cold when he thought of what he had done. He knew it was wrong, dishonourable—what you will. How he came to do it he could not tell—just as we all say when the apple's eaten and the bitter is left. He must ask his mother to make good the loss ; but it would never do to tell her the real facts of the case. He should not like *her* to think him dishonourable—and she was not well, and it would vex her terribly. He must go to her with some sort of excuse—a poor one would do, so utterly unsuspecting was she. This was humiliation indeed. He was almost ready to take a vow never to touch a card again. Almost ; but not quite.

On the other hand, his thoughts would fly off to Margaret Ducie and her thousand nameless witcheries. There was quite a wild fever in his blood when he dwelt on her. It seemed a month since he had last seen and spoken with Maria Kettle—Maria, that sweet, pale abstraction, who seemed to him to-night so unsubstantial and far away. But he did not want to think of her just now. He wanted to forget that he was engaged to her, or as good as engaged. Though some innate voice of conscience whispered that, if he valued his own peace of mind, it would be well for him to keep out of the way of the beautiful ignis fatuus which had shone on his path to-night for the first time.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DOCTOR'S VERDICT.

It was just about this time that Squire Denison, dining alone, was taken ill at the dinner-table. Very rarely indeed was Ella out at that hour, but it chanced that she had gone to spend a long evening with Lady Cleeve. The Squire's symptoms looked alarming to Aaron Stone and his wife ; and the young man, Hubert, went off on horse-back to Nullington to summon Dr. Spreckley.

The Doctor had practised in Nullington all his life. He was a man of sixty now, with a fine florid complexion, and a lover of good cheer and of whiskey ; though nobody ever saw him the worse for what he had taken. He had a cheerful, hearty way with him, that to many people was better than all his physic, seeming to think that most of the ills of life could be laughed away if his patients would only laugh heartily enough. Mr. Denison had great confidence in him ; and no wonder, since he had attended him for twenty years. Dr. Spreckley was not merely the Squire's medical attendant, but news-purveyor-in-general to him as well. Now that the Squire got out so little himself and saw so few visitors at the Hall, he looked to

Spreckley to keep him au courant with all the gossip anent mutual acquaintances and all the local doings for a dozen miles round; and Spreckley was quite equal to the demands upon him.

During the past year or two, Mr. Denison had experienced several of these sudden attacks; but none of them were so violent as was the one this evening. Dr. Spreckley's cheerful face changed when he saw the symptoms: and the look, momentary though it was, was not lost on the sick man.

"Where's Ella?" asked the Doctor, somewhat surprised at her absence.

"Miss Ella's gone to Lady Cleeve's for the evening, sir," answered Mrs. Stone, who was in attendance.

"And a good thing too," put in the Squire, rousing himself. "Look here—I won't have her told I've been ill. Do you hear—all of you? No good to worry the lassie."

Dr. Spreckley administered certain remedies, saw the Squire safely into bed, and stayed with him for a couple of hours afterwards, Aaron supplying him with a small decanter of whiskey. The symptoms were already disappearing, and Dr. Spreckley's face was hopeful.

"You'll be all right, Squire, after a good night's rest," said he with all his hearty cheerfulness. "I'll be over by ten o'clock in the morning."

When Ella returned, as she did at nine o'clock,* nothing was told her. "The master felt tired, and so went to bed betimes," was all Mrs. Stone said. And Ella suspected nothing.

While she was breakfasting the next morning—her uncle sometimes took his alone in his room—Aaron came to her, and said the master wanted her. Ella hastened to him.

"Why! are you in bed, uncle dear!" she exclaimed.

"Ay, felt lazy; thought I'd have breakfast before I got up. Why not?—Got a mind for a walk this fine morning, lassie?"

"Yes, uncle, if you wish me to go anywhere. It is a beautiful morning."

"So, so! one should get out this fine weather when one can: wish my legs were as young to get over the ground as they used to be. I want you to go to the vicarage, child, and take a letter to Kettle that I've had here these few days. It's about the votes for the Incurables, and it's time it was attended to. Tell him he must see to it for me and fill it in. Mind you are with him before ten o'clock, and then he'll not be gone out. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, uncle. I will be sure to go."

"And look here, lassie," added the Squire; "if you like to stay the morning with Maria, you can. I sha'n't want you; I shall be pottering about here half the day."

Having thus cleverly got rid of his niece, the coast was clear for Dr. Spreckley. True to his time, the Doctor drove up in his ramshackle old gig.

"You are better this morning ; considerably better," he said to his patient after a quiet examination. "That was a nasty attack, and I hope we shan't have any more of them for a long time to come."

"I was worse, Doctor, than even you knew of," said Mr. Denison. "The wind of the grave blew colder on me yesterday evening than it has ever blown before. Another such bout, and out I shall go, like the snuff of a candle. Eh, now, come ?"

"We must hope that you won't have another such bout, Squire," was Dr. Spreckley's cheerful answer.

"Is there nothing you can prescribe, or do, Doctor, that will guarantee me against another such attack ?" asked Mr. Denison with almost startling suddenness.

Dr. Spreckley put down the phial he had taken in his hand, and faced his patient. "I should be a knave, Squire, to say that I could guarantee you against anything. We can only do our best and hope for the best."

Mr. Denison was silent for a few moments, then he began again. "Look here, Spreckley ; you know how old I am—on the twenty-fourth of next April I shall be seventy years old. You know, too, what interests are at stake, and how much depends upon my living to see that day."

"I am not likely to forget," said the Doctor. "These are matters that we have talked over many a time."

"Do you believe in your heart, Spreckley, that I shall live to see that day—the twenty-fourth of next April ?" The question was put very solemnly, and the sick man craned his long neck forward and stared at the Doctor with wild hungry eyes, as though his salvation depended on the next few words.

The physician's ruddy cheek lost somewhat of its colour as he hesitated. He fidgeted nervously with his feet, he coughed behind his hand, and then he turned and faced his patient. The signs had not been lost on the Squire.

"Really, my dear sir, your question is a most awkward one," said Spreckley slowly, "and one which I am far from feeling sure that I am in a position to answer with any degree of accuracy."

"Words—words—words !" exclaimed the sick man, turning impatiently on his pillow. "Man alive ! you can answer my question if you choose to do so. All I ask is, do you *believe*, do you think in your own secret heart, that I shall live to see the twenty-fourth of April ? You can answer me that."

"Are you in earnest in wishing for an answer, Mr. Denison ?"

"Most terribly in earnest. I tell you again that another turn like that of last night would finish me. At least, I believe it would. And I might have another attack any day or any hour, eh ?"

"You might. But—but," added the Doctor, striving to soften his words, "it might not be so severe, you know."

"There are several things that I want to do before I go hence and

am seen no more," spoke the Squire in a low tone. "You would not advise me to delay doing them?"

"I would not advise you, or any man, to delay such."

"You do not think in your heart that I shall live to see the twenty-fourth of April—come now, Spreckley!"

The Doctor placed his hand gently on Mr. Denison's wrist, and bent forward. "If you must have the truth, you must."

"Yes, yes," was the eager, impatient interposition. "The truth—the truth."

"Well then—these attacks of yours are increasing both in frequency and violence. Each one that comes diminishes your reserve of strength. One more sharp attack might, and probably would, prove fatal to you."

"You must ward it off, Spreckley."

"I don't know how to."

The Squire lifted his hand slightly, and then let it drop on the coverlet again. Was it a gesture of resignation, or of despair? His chin drooped forward on his breast, and there was unbroken silence in the room for some moments.

"Doctor," said Mr. Denison then, and his tones sounded strangely hollow, "I will give you five thousand pounds if you can keep me alive till the twenty-fifth of April. Five thousand, Spreckley!"

"All the money in the world cannot prolong life by a single hour when our time has come," said the surgeon. "You know that as well as I, Mr. Denison. Whatever human skill can do for you shall be done; of that you may rest assured."

"But still you think I can't last out—eh?"

The Doctor took one of his patient's hands and pressed it gently between both of his. "My dear old friend, I think that nothing short of a miracle could prolong your life till then;" and there was an unwonted tremor in his voice as he spoke.

Nothing more was said. Dr. Spreckley turned to the door, remarking that he would come up again later in the day.

"There's no necessity," said the Squire, with spirit, as if he took the fiat in dudgeon and did not believe it. "No occasion for you to come at all, to-day. I am better; much better. I should not have stayed in bed this morning, only you ordered me."

"Very well, Squire."

Mr. Denison lay back on his pillows and shut his eyes as the door closed on his friend and physician. Aaron Stone, coming into the room a little later, thought his master was asleep, and went out without disturbing him. An hour later Mr. Denison's bell rang loudly and peremptorily. The Squire was sitting up in bed when Aaron entered the room, and the old man marvelled to see him look so much better in so short a time. "An hour since he was like a man half dead, and now he looks as well as he did a year ago," muttered Aaron to himself. There was, indeed, a brightness in his eyes and a

faint colour in his cheeks, such as had not been seen there for a long time; and his voice had something of its old sharp and peremptory tone.

"Aaron, what do you think Dr. Spreckley has been telling me this morning?" he suddenly asked.

"I'm a bad hand at guessing, Squire, as you ought to know by this time," was the somewhat ungracious answer.

"He tells me that I shall not live to see the twenty-fourth of next April."

Aaron's rugged face turned as white as it was possible for it to turn; a small tray that he had in his hands fell with a crash to the ground.

"Oh! master, don't say that—don't say that!" he groaned.

"But I must say it: and what's more, I feel it may be true," returned the Squire.

"I can't believe it; and I won't," stammered the old servant: who, whatever his faults of temper might have been, was passionately attached to his master. Aaron had never seriously thought the end was so near. The Squire had had these queer attacks; true: but did he not always rally from them and be as well as ever? Why, look at him now!

"Spreckley must be a fool, sir, to say such a thing as that! Had he been at the whiskey bottle?"

"I forced the truth from him," spoke the Squire. "It is always safest to get at the truth, however unpalatable it may be. Eh, now?"

"I'm fairly dazed," said the old man. "But I don't believe it. When you go, master, it will be time for me to go, too."

"It's not that I'm afraid to go," said the Squire—"when did a Denison fear to die?—and Heaven knows my life has not been such a pleasant one of late years that I need greatly care to find the end near. It's the property, Aaron—this old roof-tree and all the broad acres—you know who will come in for them if I don't live to see next April."

The old serving-man's mouth worked convulsively; he tried to speak but could not. Tears streamed down his rugged cheeks. Pretending to busy himself about the fireplace, he kept his back turned to the Squire.

"If it were not for that, I should not care how soon my summons came," continued Mr. Denison; "but it's hard to have the apple snatched from you at the moment of victory. I would give half that I'm possessed of to anyone who would insure my living to the end of next April. Why not?"

"What's Spreckley but an old woman? he don't know," said Aaron. "Why don't you have some of the big doctors down from London, sir? Like enough they could pull you through when Spreckley can't."

The Squire laughed, a little dismally. "You seem to forget that I

had a couple of big-wigs down from London on the same errand some months ago. They and Spreckley had a consultation, and what was the result? They fully endorsed all that he had done, and said that they themselves could not have improved on his method of treatment. It would not be an atom of use, old comrade, to have them down again. That's my belief."

It was not Aaron's. He had no particular opinion of Spreckley—and he was fearfully anxious.

"Poor Ella! Poor lassie!" murmured the Squire very gently. "I always hoped she would be the mistress of Heron Dyke when I was gone. But—but—but——" He broke off. He could not speak of it. Things just now seemed very bitter, grievously hard to bear.

"Won't you get up, master?"

"Not just now. You can come in by-and-by, Aaron," replied the Squire: and Aaron crept out of the room without another word.

The sitting-room of Aaron Stone and his wife was a homely apartment, opening from the kitchen. To this he betook himself, shut the door behind him, and sat down in silence. Dorothy had her lap full of white paper, cutting it out in fringed rounds to cover some preserves that had been made. Happening to look at her husband, she saw the tears trickling fast down his withered cheeks.

Dorothy's eyes and mouth alike opened. She gazed at him with a mixture of curiosity and alarm. Not for twenty years had she seen such a sight. Pushing back her silver hair under her neat white cap, she dropped the scissors and the paper, and sat staring.

"What is it?" she asked in a faint voice, picturing all kinds of unheard-of evils. "Anything happened to the lad, Aaron?"

"The lad" was Hubert; her grandson. He was very dear to Dorothy: perhaps not less so to Aaron. Aaron did not answer; could not: and, as if to relieve her fears, Hubert came in the next moment.

"Why, grandfather, what on earth has come to you?" cried the young man, no less astonished than Dorothy.

With a half sob, Aaron told what had come to them: the trouble had taken all his crusty ungraciousness out of him. The master was going to die. Spreckley said he could not keep him alive until next April. And Miss Ella would have to turn out of Heron Dyke to make way for those enemies, the other branch. And they should have to turn out too; and he and Dorothy, for all he knew, would die in the workhouse!

An astounding revelation. No one spoke for a little while. Then Dorothy began with her superstitions.

"I knew we should have a death in the house before long. There's been a winding-sheet in the candle twice this week; and on Sunday night as I came over the marshes three corpse-candles appeared there and seemed to follow me all the way across. I didn't think it would be the Squire, though: I thought of Bolton's wife."

Bolton was the coachman, and his wife was delicate.

"Hush, granny!" reproved Hubert; "all that is nonsense, you know. Why does not the Squire call in further advice?" he added after a pause. "Spreckley's not good for much save a gossip."

"I asked him why not," said Aaron; "but he seems to think his time is come. If they could only keep him alive till next April, he says: that's all he harps upon."

"And I am sure there must be means of doing it," cried Hubert. "What one medical man can't do, another may. I have a great mind to call in Dr. Jago—saying nothing about it beforehand. He is wonderfully clever."

"The master might not forgive you, Hubert."

"But if the new man could prolong his life!" debated Hubert. "I'll think about it," he added, catching up his low-crowned hat.

He walked across the yard in his well-made shooting-coat that a lord might wear, and whistled to one of the dogs. The two housemaids stood in what was called the keeping-room, ironing fine things at the table underneath the window. They looked after the young man with admiring eyes. He held himself aloof from them, as a master does from a servant, but the girls liked him, for in manner to them he was civil and kind.

"Is he not handsome!" cried Ann. "And aren't both the old people proud of him?"

"What do you think I saw last night?" said Martha in a low tone, as Hubert Stone disappeared through the green door leading to the shrubbery. "I was coming home from that errand to Nullington, when, out there in the park, hiding behind a tree and peering at our windows here, was a grey figure that one might have taken for a ghost—poor Susan Keen. She did give me a turn, though."

"I wonder they don't stop her watching the house at night in the way she does," returned Ann, shaking out one of Mrs. Stone's muslin caps. "It gives one a creepy feeling to have her watching the windows like that—and to know what she's watching for."

"You know what she says, Ann!"

"Yes, I know; and a very uncomfortable thing it is," rejoined the younger servant. "If she sees Katherine at the window——"

"She told me again last night that she does see her," interrupted the elder; "has seen her three times now, in all. She says that Katherine stands at the window of her old room, in the moonlight."

Ann shook herself; she was nearly as superstitious as old Dorothy. "Don't you see what it implies, Martha? If Katherine is seen at the window, she must be in the house; that's all. I wish they'd have that north wing barred up!"

"You are ironing that net bandkerchief all askew, Ann!"

"One has not got one's proper wits, talking of these ghostly things," was Ann's petulant answer, as she lifted the net off the blanket with a fling.

Hubert, meanwhile, was going down to the shore. What he had learnt troubled him in no measured degree, and his busy brain was hard at work. If only this fiat, which threatened evil to all of them, might be averted!

The tide was out, and he walked along the sands, flinging his stick now and again into the water for the dog to fetch out, as he recalled what he had heard about the almost miraculous skill of this Dr. Jago; who was said, nevertheless, to be an unscrupulous man in his remedies—kill or cure. Could *he* keep that life in Mr. Denison, which, as it appeared, Dr. Spreckley could not? These bold practitioners were often lucky ones. If Jago —

Hubert Stone halted, both in steps and thought. There flashed into his mind, he knew not why, something he had read in an old French work, recently bought: for the young fellow was a good French scholar. It was a case analogous to Mr. Denison's—where a patient had been kept alive, in spite of nature—or almost in spite of it. The means tried then, and which were minutely described, might answer now. Hubert's breath quickened as he thought of it: and for two hours he remained there, revolving this and that.

A strange look of mingled excitement and determination sat on his face when he got back to the Hall. Mrs. Stone lamented to him that the dinner was over, meaning their dinner, all cold now. Hubert answered that he did not want dinner; but he wanted to see the Squire if he were alone. Yes, he was alone; and he seemed pretty well now. And not a word was to be breathed to Miss Ella about his illness: those were the strict orders issued.

When Hubert went in he found the Squire seated in his easy chair in front of the fire. He looked very worn and thin, but his eyes were as resolute and his lips as firmly set as they had ever been.

"After what my grandfather told me this morning I could not help coming to see you, sir," said Hubert. "This is very sad news; but I hope that it is much exaggerated."

"There's no exaggeration about it, boy. You see before you, I fear, a dying man. Come now!"

"I am very, very sorry to hear it."

"Ay—ay—good lad, good lad! Some of you will miss me a bit, eh?"

"We shall all miss you very much, Squire: we shall never have such a master again. Of course, sir, I know that your great wish all along has been to live till your seventieth birthday had come and gone. Surely you will live to see that wish fulfilled!"

"That's just what I shan't live to see, if Spreckley's right," answered the Squire, and his face darkened as he spoke. "For my life I care little; it has been like a flickering candle these few years past. It's the knowledge that the estate will go away, from my pretty birdie, to a man whom I have hated all my life, that tries me. It is like the taste of Dead Sea apples in my mouth."

Hubert drew his chair a little nearer—for he had been bidden to

sit. "If you will pardon me, sir, for saying it, I do not think you ought to take what Dr. Spreckley says for granted. You should have better advice."

"The London doctors have been down once—and they did me no good. They'd not do it now. And there'd be the trouble and expense incurred for nothing."

"I was not thinking of London doctors, sir, but of one nearer home—Dr. Jago."

"Pooh! They say he is a quack."

Hubert Stone bent his head, and talked low and earnestly—describing what he had heard of Dr. Jago's wonderful skill. "I—I know a little of medicine myself, sir," he added; "sometimes I wish I had been brought up to it, for I believe I have a natural aptitude for the science, and I read medical books, and have been in hospitals; and—and I think, Squire, that a clever practitioner who knows his business could at least keep you alive until next April. Ay, and past it. I almost think I could."

Mr. Denison smiled. The idea of Hubert dabbling in such things tickled him. "Well, and how would you set about it?" he demanded, in pleasant mockery.

Hubert said a few words in a low tone; his voice seemed to grow lower as he continued. He looked strangely in earnest; his face was dark and eager.

"The lad must be mad—to think he could keep me alive by those means!" interrupted the Squire, staring at Hubert from under his shaggy brows, as though he half thought he saw a lunatic before him.

"If you would only let me finish, sir—only listen while I describe the treatment——"

"Pray, did you ever witness the treatment you would describe—and see a life prolonged by it?"

Without directly answering the question, Hubert resumed the argument in his low and eager tones. Gradually the Squire grew interested—perhaps almost unto belief.

"And you could—could doctor me up in this manner, you think!" he exclaimed, lifting his hand and letting it drop again. "Boy, you almost take my breath away."

"Perhaps I could not, sir. But I say Dr. Jago might."

Squire Denison sat thinking, his head bent down. "Do you know this Dr. Jago?" he presently asked. "Have you met him?"

"Once or twice, sir. And I was struck with an impression of his inward power."

"Well, I—I will see him," decided the Squire. "And if he thinks he can—can keep life in me, I will make it worth his while. Why, lad, I'd give half my fortune, nearly, to be able to will away Heron Dyke out of the clutches of those harpies, who look to inherit it, and who have kept their spies about us here. You may bring this new doctor to me."

A glad light came into Hubert's face : he was at least as anxious as his master that Heron Dyke should not pass to strangers.

"Shall I bring him to-morrow, sir?"

"Ay, to-morrow. Why not? Spreckley will be here at ten; let the other come at noon. But look you here, lad: not a word to him beforehand about this idea of yours, this new—new treatment. I'll see him first."

The clock was striking twelve the following day when Dr. Jago rang at the door of the hall. He was a little, dark-featured, foreign-looking man of thirty, with a black moustache and a pointed beard, and small restless eyes that seemed never to look steadfastly at anything or anybody, imparting an impression of being always on his guard. He had come to Nullington about a year ago, a stranger to everyone in it, and had started there in practice. His charges were low, and his patients chiefly those who could not afford to pay much in the shape of doctors' bills. But Dr. Spreckley was an elderly man, and Dr. Downes might be considered an old man, so there was no knowing what might happen in the course of a few years. Meanwhile Theophilus Jago possessed his soul in patience and made ends meet as best he could. It was a great event in his life to be sent for by the master of Heron Dyke.

"You are Dr. Jago, I think?" began the Squire, who was again in bed; and the Doctor bowed assent.

"I and my medical attendant, Dr. Spreckley, have had a slight difference of opinion. In all probability he will not visit me again, and I have sent for you in the hope that we may get on better together than Spreckley and I did."

"I am flattered by your preference, sir. You may rely upon my doing my best to serve you in every way."

"Probably you may have heard that I have been ill for a long time: people will talk: and, as a medical man, you most likely are aware of the nature of my complaint?"

Dr. Jago admitted this.

"I had a bad attack two days ago. Yesterday I asked Spreckley whether I should last over the twenty-fourth of next April. He told me that I could do so only by a miracle. He says I can't live, and I say that I must and will live over the date in question."

"And you have sent for me to—to——?"

"To keep me alive. Spreckley can't do it. You must. Now, don't say another word till you have examined me."

Not another word did Dr. Jago utter for a quarter of an hour, beyond asking certain questions in connection with the malady. This over, he sat down by the bedside and drew a long breath.

"Well, what's the verdict? Out with it," added the Squire grimly, the old hungry, wistful look rising in his eyes.

"I suppose you want to hear the truth and nothing but the truth, Mr. Denison?" said Dr. Jago.

"That is precisely what I do want to hear. Why not?"

"Then, sir, I think it most probable that Dr. Spreckley is correct. I fear I can only confirm his opinion."

There was a moment or two of silence. "Then you say, with him, that I shall not live to see the twenty-fourth of April?"

"There is, of course, a possibility that you may do so," replied Dr. Jago, "but the probabilities are all the other way. I am very sorry, sir, to have to tell you this."

"Keep your sorrow until you are asked for it," returned the Squire, drily. "Perhaps you will pour me out half a glass of that Madeira. I am not so strong as I should like to be."

Dr. Jago did as he was requested, and then sat down and waited. Turning on him with startling suddenness, the sick man seized him by the wrist with a grip of iron, to pull him closer, and spoke with a grim earnestness.

"Look here, Jago, it's not of any use your telling me, or a thousand other doctors, that I shall not live to see April. I must and will live till then, and you must see that I do: you must keep me in life. Man! you stare as if I were asking you to kill me, instead of to cure me."

Dr. Jago tried to smile. He evidently doubted whether he had to deal with a lunatic. "Pardon me, Mr. Denison," he said, "but in your condition you must avoid excitement. Perfect quiet is your greatest safeguard."

The sick man shrugged his shoulders. "Well, well, you are perhaps right. You know my young secretary—Hubert Stone?"

"A little."

"And I daresay you think him a shrewd, clever young fellow, eh? But he is more clever than you think for, and has dabbled in many a curious science; medicine, for one. He—listen, Mr. Physician—he has suggested a mode of treatment by which he believes I may be kept alive. Come now!"

Dr. Jago's face expressed a mixture of surprise and incredulity not unmingled with sarcasm. Mr. Hubert Stone would indeed be a very clever gentleman if he could keep life in a dying man.

"I do not know of any such treatment, Mr. Denison."

"Possibly not. But I suppose you are open to learn it?"

"If it can be taught me."

"Well, you go into the next room. Hubert is there, I believe, and will explain it to you better than I can. I never bothered my head about physics. When the conference is over, come back to me."

Half an hour had elapsed; quite that; and the Squire was growing impatient, when Dr. Jago returned. He was looking very grave.

"Will the treatment answer?" he cried out impatiently, before the Doctor could speak.

"It might answer, Mr. Denison; I do not say it would not. But—it is dangerous."

"And what if it is dangerous? I am willing to risk it—and I shall pay you well. What, you hesitate? Why, I have heard say that dangerous remedies are not unknown to you; that with you it is sometimes kill or cure."

"In a hopeless case possibly. Not otherwise."

"And have you not just told me mine is hopeless?"

"True."

"Then you will take me in hand. Dear me!—if I were telling you to give me a dose of prussic acid as you stand there, you could but look as you are looking. See here. Listen. I will have these—these remedies tried, young man, and by you. I know your skill. I give you five hundred pounds at once; and I make it up to two thousand if you carry me over to the twenty-fifth of April."

"I accept the terms," said Dr. Jago, awaking from a reverie, and speaking with prompt decision now his mind was made up. To a struggling practitioner the money looked like a mine of gold: and perhaps Squire Denison's imperative will influenced his. "And I hope and trust I *shall* be able to carry you over the necessary period," he added with intense earnestness. "My best endeavours shall be devoted to it."

Outside the door Hubert Stone was waiting, anxiety in his eyes.

"Yes, I have consented," said Dr. Jago, in answer to their silent questioning. "If we succeed—well. But I cannot forget the risk. And these hazardous risks, if they be discovered, are fatal to the reputation of a professional man."

"Take the book home with you, and study the case well," said Hubert, putting a volume in the Doctor's hand. "Some little risk there must of course be, but I think not much. It succeeded there: why should it not succeed with Squire Denison?"

That evening Dr. Spreckley received a letter, written by Hubert Stone in his master's name, dismissing him from further attendance at Heron Dyke. The Squire added a kind message and enclosed a cheque; but he very unmistakably hinted that Dr. Spreckley was not expected to call again, even as a friend. Two doctors who held opposing views, and who pursued totally opposite modes of treatment, had best not come into contact with each other.

(To be continued.)

CREWEL-WORK.

THE border of blossoms and fruit and flow'rs
 Grows under the skilful hand,
 And butterflies flutter among the leaves,
 While birds of a tropic land
 Perch on the boughs of fantastic trees—
 Themselves a fantastic band.

The soft blues melt into softer greys,
 And the grey is lost in the green,
 A silken thread crosses with fairy foot
 Its homelier rivals between,
 As a gay Cinderella, e'er stroke of twelve,
 In her jewels and beauty's sheen.

The purples and fawns and delicate pinks
 Are flushed by a crimson ray,
 And a golden streak glimmers out here and there,
 Like a sunbeam in wanton play
 E'er its statelier comrades have marched in sight
 To cheer the twilight away.

And the lady bends over her dainty work,
 A dreamy smile on her face,
 Thinking of days buried deep in the past,
 While her dext'rous fingers trace
 Forms copied from ancient tapestry, full
 Of nice and whimsical grace.

Thinking, perchance, of those war-like times
 When ladies lived in their bow'rs,
 Shut out from the stirring world beyond,
 Shut in with their music and flow'rs,
 Contenting themselves with needle and lute
 Through all the languid hours :

When the highest art the maiden knew
 Was cunningly to pourtray,
 In brodered figure, the chivalrous deeds
 Of battle or tournament gay,
 And border the same with some quaint device
 Of formal tendril and spray :

When the tale of daring which sounded so sweet
 As it fell from her lover's tongue,
 Or the touching ballad of love and death
 Which her little page had sung,
 Might repeat itself on her chamber walls
 Where the costly arras hung.

"Were those happier days," the lady asks,
 In a pause of her pleasant dream,
 "Than these modern days of excitement and haste,
 Cheap literature, gas, and steam;
 When women may brave the world alone,
 And 'Advance' is the thought supreme?"

When only a passing hour, now and then,
 Can be snatched from the busy day
 To play with the crewels heaped on her lap,
 And indulge in phantasy;
 When adventures no longer wait to be told
 Of crusader or mock-affray:

But chase, and battle, and foreign tour
 Are followed by line and rule;
 And the noble thought is left unsaid
 In the fear of ridicule,
 And the generous impulse sternly checked
 In fashion's frigid school.

"Is it better so?—Is it gain or loss?"
 She asks with a pensive sigh:
 And still the balance sways up and down,
 And still there is no reply;
 Till at last a whisper sounds in her soul—
 "We are born, and then we die.

"All things must change in this life of ours
 As we pass to the life supreme;
 And still what is good is left behind;
 And still, like a struggling beam,
 Good shines out to-day, if but we discern
 What *is*, not what it would *seem*.

"If, through the crust and varnish, we pierce
 To the beating heart below,
 We shall find the self-same spirit there
 As in ages long ago;
 And own that even these common-place times
 May have the heroic to show.

"Aye, the 'golden year,' as the poet sings,
 Is for ever at the door;
 And so our part must always be
 To garner the precious store—
 To add to the treasures the past has brought,
 From the present, still more and more."

EMMA RHODES.

VERENA FONTAINE'S REBELLION.

THE dwellings in Ship Street, Tower Hill, may be regarded as desirable residences by the young merchant-seamen whose vessels are lying in the neighbouring docks, but they certainly do not possess much attraction for the general eye.

Seated in Edward Pym's parlour, the features of the room gradually impressed themselves upon my mind, and they remain there still. They would have remained, I think, without the dreadful tragedy that was so soon to take place in it. It was weary work waiting. Captain Tanerton, tired with his long and busy day, was nodding asleep in the opposite chair, and I had nothing to do but look about me.

It was a small room, rather shabby, the paper of a greenish cast, the faded carpet originally red : and the bed-room behind, as much as could be seen of it through the half-open door, looked smaller and poorer. The chairs were horsehair, the small table in the middle had a purple cloth on it, on which stood the lamp, that the landlady had just lighted. A carved ivory ornament, representing a procession of priests and singers, probably a present to Mrs. Rich-enough from some merchant-captain, stood under a glass shade on a bracket against the wall ; the mantelpiece was garnished with a looking-glass and some china shepherds and shepherdesses. A monkey-jacket of Pym's lay across the back of a chair ; some books and his small desk were on the chiffonier. In the rooms above, as we learnt later, lodged a friend of Pym's, one Alfred Saxby, who was looking out for a third mate's berth.

At last Pym came in. Uncommonly surprised he seemed to see us sitting there, but not at all put out : he thought the Captain had come down on some business connected with the ship. Jack quietly opened the ball ; saying what he had to say.

"Yes, sir, I do know where Miss Verena Fontaine is, but I decline to say," was Pym's answer when he had listened.

"No, sir, nothing will induce me to say," he added to further remonstrance, "and you cannot compel me. I am under your authority at sea, Captain Tanerton, but I am not on shore—and not at all in regard to my private affairs. Miss Verena Fontaine is under the protection of friends, and that is quite enough."

Enough or not enough, this was the utmost we could get from him. His captain talked, and he talked, each of them in a civilly-cold way ; but nothing more satisfactory came of it. Pym wound up by saying the young lady was his cousin and he could take care of her without being interfered with.

"Do you trust him, Johnny Ludlow?" asked Jack, as we came away.

"I don't trust him on the whole; not a bit of it. But he seems to speak truth in saying she is with friends."

And, as the days went on, bringing no tidings of Verena, Sir Dace Fontaine grew angry as a raging tiger.

When a ship is going out of dock, she is more coquettish than a beauty in her teens. Not in herself, but in her movements. Advertised to sail to-day, you will be told she'll not start until to-morrow; and when to-morrow comes the departure will be put off until the next day, perhaps to the next week.

Thus it was with the *Rose of Delhi*. From some uncompromising exigencies, whether connected with the cargo, the crew, the brokers, or any other of the unknown mysteries pertaining to ships, the day that was to have witnessed her departure—Thursday—did not witness it. The brokers, Freeman and Co., let it transpire on board that she would go out of dock the next morning. About mid-day Captain Tanerton presented himself at their office in Eastcheap.

"I shall not sail to-morrow—with your permission," said he to Mr. James Freeman.

"Yes, you will—if she's ready," returned the broker. "Could says she will be."

"Could may think so; I do not. But, whether she be ready or not, Mr. Freeman, I don't intend to take her out to-morrow."

The words might be decisive words, but the Captain's tone was genial as he spoke them, and his frank, pleasant smile sat on his face. Mr. Freeman looked at him. They valued Captain Tanerton as they perhaps valued no other master in their employ, these brothers Freeman; but James had a temper that was especially happy in contradiction.

"I suppose you'd like to say that you won't go out on a Friday!"

"That's just it," said Jack.

"You are superstitious, Captain Tanerton," mocked the broker.

"I am not," answered Jack. "But I sail with those who are. Sailors are more foolish on this point than you can imagine: and I believe—I believe in my conscience—that ships, sailing on a Friday, have come to grief through their crew losing heart. No matter what impediment is met with—bad weather, accidents, what not—the men say at once it's of no use, we sailed on a Friday. They lose their spirit, and their energy with it; and I say, Mr. Freeman, that vessels have been lost through this, which might have otherwise been saved. I will not go out of dock to-morrow; and I refuse to do it in your interest as much as in my own."

"Oh, bother," was all James Freeman rejoined. "You'll have to go if she's ready."

But the words made an impression. James Freeman knew what sailors were nearly as well as Jack knew: and he could not help

recalling to memory that beautiful ship of Freeman Brothers, the *Lily of Japan*. The *Lily* had been lost only six months ago; and those of her crew, who were saved, religiously stuck to it that the calamity was brought about through having sailed on a Friday.

The present question did not come to an issue. For, on the Friday morning, the *Rose of Delhi* was not ready for sea; would not be ready that day. On the Saturday morning she was not ready either; and it was finally decided that Monday should be the day of departure. On the Saturday afternoon Captain Tanerton ran down to Timberdale for four-and-twenty hours; Squire Todhetley, his visit to London over, travelling down by the same train.

Verena Fontaine had not yet turned up, and Sir Dace was nearly crazy. Not only was he angry at being thwarted, but one absorbing, special fear lay upon him—that she would come back a married woman. Pym was capable of any sin, he told the Squire and Coralie, even of buying the wedding-ring; and Verena was capable of letting it be put on her finger. "No papa," dissented Coralie in her equable manner, "Vera is too fond of money and of the good things money buys, to risk the loss of the best part of her fortune. She will not marry Pym until she is of age; be sure of that. When he has sailed she will come home safe and sound, and tell us where she has been."

Captain Tanerton went down, I say, to Timberdale. He stayed at the rectory with his wife and brother until the Sunday afternoon, and then returned to London. The *Rose of Delhi* was positively going out on Monday, so he had to be back—and, I may as well say here, that Jack, good-natured Jack, had invited me to go in her as far as Gravesend.

During that brief stay at Timberdale, Jack was not in his usual spirits. His wife, Alice, noticed it, and asked him whether anything was the matter. Not anything whatever, Jack readily answered. In truth there was not. At least, anything he could talk of. A weight lay on his spirits, and he could not account for it. The strong instinct, which had seemed to warn him against sailing with Pym again, had gradually left him since he knew that Pym was to sail, whether or not. In striving to make the best of it, he had thrown off the feeling: and the unaccountable depression that weighed him down could not arise from that cause. It was a strange thing altogether, this; one that never, in all his life, had he had any experience of; but it was not less strange than true.

Monday. The *Rose of Delhi* lay in her place in the freshness of the sunny morning, making ready to go out of dock with the incoming tide. I went on board betimes: and I thought I had never been in such a bustling scene before. The sailors knew what they were about, I conclude, but to me it seemed all confusion. The Captain I could not see anywhere; but his chief officer, Pym,

seemed to be more busy than a certain common enemy of ours is said to be in a gale of wind.

"Is the Captain not on board?" I asked of Mark Ferrar, as he was whisking past me on deck.

"Oh no, sir; not yet. The Captain will not come on board till the last moment—if he does then."

The words took me by surprise. "What do you mean, by saying 'If he does then'?"

"He has so much to do, sir; he is at the office now, signing the bills of lading. If he can't get done in time he will join at Gravesend when we take on some passengers. The Captain is not wanted on board when we are going out of dock, Mr. Johnny," added Ferrar, seeing my perplexed look. "The river-pilot takes the ship out."

He pointed to the latter personage, just then making his appearance on deck. I wondered whether all river-pilots were like him. He was broad enough to make two ordinarily stout people; and his voice, from long continuous shouting, had become nothing less than a raven's croak.

At the last moment, when the ship was getting away, and I had given the captain up, he came on board. How glad I was to see his handsome, kindly face!

"I've had a squeak for it, Johnny," he laughed, as he shook my hand: "but I meant to go down with you if I could."

Then came all the noise and stir of getting away: the croaking of the pilot alone distinguishable to my uninitiated ears. "Slack away the stern-line"—he called it starn. "Haul in head-rope." "Here, carpenter, bear a hand, get the cork-fender over the quarter-gallery." "What are you doing aft there?—why don't you slack away that stern-line?" Every other moment it seemed to me that we were going to pitch into the craft in the pool, or they into us. However, we got on without mishap.

Captain Tanerton was crossing the ship, after holding a confab with the pilot, when a young man, whom he did not recognize, stepped aside out of his way, and touched his cap. The Captain looked surprised, for the badge on the cap was the one worn by his own officers.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Mr. Saxby, if you please, sir."

"Mr. Saxby! What do you do here?"

"Third mate, if you please, sir," repeated the young man. "Your third mate, Mr. Jones, met with an accident yesterday; he broke his leg; and my friend, Pym, spoke of me to Mr. Gould."

Captain Tanerton was not only surprised, but vexed. First, for the accident to Jones, who was a very decent young fellow; next, at his being superseded by a stranger, and a friend of Pym's. He put a few questions, found the new man's papers were in order, and so made the best of it.

"You will find me a good and considerate master, Mr. Saxby, if you do your duty with a will," he said in a kind tone.

"I hope I shall, sir; I'll try to," answered the young man.

On we went swimmingly, in the wake of the tug-boat; but this desirable tranquillity was ere long destined to be marred.

On coming up from the state-room, as they called it, after regaling ourselves on a cold collation, the Captain was pointing out to me something on shore, when one of the crew approached hastily, and touched his cap. I found it was the carpenter: a steady-looking man, who was fresh to the ship, having joined her half an hour before starting.

"Beg pardon, sir," he began. "Might I ask you when this ship was pumped out last?"

"Why, she is never pumped out," replied the Captain.

"Well, sir," returned the man, "it came into my head just now to sound her, and I find there's two feet of water in the hold."

"Nonsense," said Jack: "you must be mistaken. Why, she has never made a cupful of water since she was built. We have to put water in her to keep her sweet."

"Anyway, sir, there's two feet o' water in her now."

The Captain looked at the man steadily for a moment, and then thought it might be as well to verify the assertion—or the contrary—himself, being a practical man. Taking the sounding-rod from the carpenter's hand, he wiped it dry with an old bag lying near, and then proceeded to sound the well. Quite true: there were two feet of water. No time lost he. Ordering the carpenter to rig the pumps, he called all hands to man them.

For a quarter of an hour, or twenty minutes, the pumps were worked without intermission; then the Captain sounded, as before, doing it himself. There was no diminution of water—it stood at the same level as before pumping. Upon that, he and the carpenter went down into the hold, to listen along the ship's sides, and discover, if they could, where the water was coming in. Five minutes later, Jack was on deck again, his face grave.

"It is coming in abreast of the main hatchway on the starboard side; we can hear it distinctly," he said to the pilot. "I must order the ship back again: I think it right to do so." And the broad pilot, who seemed a very taciturn pilot, made no demur to this, except a grunt. So the tug-boat was ordered to turn round and tow us back again.

"Where's Mr. Pym?" cried the Captain. "Mr. Pym!"

"Mr. Pym's in the cabin, sir," said the steward, who chanced to be passing.

"In the cabin!" echoed Jack, in an accent that seemed to imply the cabin was not Mr. Pym's proper place just then. "Send him to me if you please, steward."

"Yes, sir," replied the steward. But he did not obey with the

readiness exacted on board ship. He hesitated, as if wanting to say something before turning away.

No Pym came. Jack grew impatient, and called out an order or two. Young Saxby came up, touching his cap, according to rule.

"Do you want me, sir?"

"I want Mr. Pym. He is below. Ask him to come to me instantly."

It brought forth Pym. Jack's head was turned away for a moment, and I saw what he did not. That Pym had a fiery face, and walked as if his limbs were slipping from under him.

"Oh, you are here at last, Mr. Pym—did you not receive my first message?" cried Jack, turning round. "The cargo must be broken out to find the place of leakage. See about it smartly: there's no time to waste."

Pym had caught hold of something at hand to enable him to stand steady. He had lost his wits, that was certain; for he stuttered out an answer to the effect that the cargo might be—hanged.

The Captain saw his state then. Feeling a need of renovation possibly, after his morning's exertions, Mr. Pym had been making free, a great deal too much so, with the bottled ale below, and had finished up with brandy-and-water.

The cargo might be hanged!

Captain Tanerton, his brow darkening, spoke a sharp, short, stern reprimand, and ordered Mr. Pym to his cabin.

What could have possessed Pym, unless it might be the spirit that was in the brandy, nobody knew. He refused to obey, broke into open defiance, and gave Captain Tanerton sauce to his face.

"Take him below," said the Captain quietly, to those who were standing round. "Mr. Ferrar, you will lock Mr. Pym's cabin door, if you please, and bring me the key."

This was done, and Mr. Pym engaged. He kicked at his cabin door, and shook it; but he could not escape: he was a prisoner. He swore for a little while at the top of his voice; then he commenced some uproarious singing, and finally fell on his bed and went to sleep.

Hands were set to work to break out the cargo, which they piled on deck; and the source of the leakage was discovered. It seemed a slight thing, after all, to have caused so much commotion—nothing but an old treenail that had not been properly plugged-up. I said so to Ferrar.

"Ah, Mr. Johnny," was Ferrar's answering remark, his face and tone strangely serious, "slight as it may seem to you, it might have sunk us all this night, had we chanced to anchor off Gravesend."

II.

WHAT with the pumps, that were kept at work, and the shifting of the cargo, and the hammering they made in stopping up the leak, we had enough to do this time. And about half-past three o'clock in the afternoon the brave ship, which had gone out so proudly with the tide, got back ignominiously with the end of it, and came to an anchor outside the graving-dock, there not being sufficient water to allow of her entering it. The damage was already three-parts repaired, and the ship would make her final start on the morrow.

"'Twas nothing but a good Providence could have put it into my head to sound the ship, sir," remarked the carpenter, wiping his hot face, as he came on deck for something or other he needed. "But for that, we might none of us have seen the morning's sun."

Jack nodded. These special interpositions of God's good care are not rare, though we do not always recognise them. And yet, but for that return back, the miserable calamity so soon to fall, would not have had the chance to take place.

Captain Tanerton caused himself to be rowed ashore, first of all ordering the door of his prisoner to be unfastened. I got into the waterman's wherry with him, for I had nothing to stay on board for. And a fine ending it was to my day's pleasuring!

"Never mind, Johnny," he said, as we parted. "You can come with us again to-morrow, and I hope we shall have a more lucky start."

Captain Tanerton went straight to the brokers', saw Mr. James Freeman, and told him he would *not* take out Edward Pym. If he did, the man's fate would probably be that of irons from Gravesend to Calcutta.

And James Freeman, a thorough foe to brandy-and-water when taken at wrong times, listened to reason, and gave not a word of dissent. He there and then made Ferrar chief mate, and put another one second in Ferrar's place; a likely young man in their employ who was waiting for a berth. This perfectly satisfied Captain Tanerton, under the circumstances.

The Captain was then rowed back to his ship. By that time it was five o'clock. He told Ferrar of the change; who thanked him heartily, a glow of satisfaction rising to his honest face.

"Where's Pym?" asked the Captain. "He must take his things out of the ship."

"Pym is not on board, sir. Soon after you left, he came up and went ashore: he seemed to have pretty nearly slept off the drink. Sir Dace Fontaine is below," added Ferrar, dropping his voice.

"Sir Dace Fontaine! Does he want me?"

"He wanted Mr. Pym, sir. He has been looking into every part of the ship: he is looking still. He fancies his daughter is concealed on board."

"Oh nonsense!" cried the Captain; "he can't fancy that. As if Miss Fontaine would come down here—and board ships!"

"She was on board yesterday, sir."

"What!" cried the Captain.

"Mr. Pym brought her on board yesterday afternoon, sir," continued Ferrar, his voice as low as it could well go. "He was showing her about the ship."

"How do you know this, Mr. Ferrar?"

"I was here, sir. Expecting to sail last week, I sent my traps on board. Yesterday, wanting a memorandum-book out of my desk, I came down for it. That's how I saw them."

Captain Tanerton, walking forward to meet Sir Dace, knitted his brow. Was Mr. Pym drawing the careless, light-headed girl into mischief? Sir Dace evidently thought so.

"I tell you, Captain Tanerton, she is quite likely to be on board, concealed as a stow-away," persisted Sir Dace, in answer to the Captain's assurance that Verena was not, and could not be in the ship. "When you are safe away from land, she will come out of hiding and they will declare their marriage. That they are married, is only too likely. He brought her on board yesterday afternoon when the ship was lying in St. Katharine's Dock."

"Do you know that he did?" cried Jack, wondering whence Sir Dace got his information.

"I am told so. As I got up your ladder just now I enquired of the first man I saw, whether a young lady was on board. He said no, but that a young lady had come on board with Mr. Pym yesterday afternoon to see the ship. The man was your ship-keeper in dock."

"How did you hear we had got back to-day, Sir Dace?"

"I came down this afternoon to search the ship before she sailed—I was under a misapprehension as to the time of her going out. The first thing I heard was, that the *Rose of Delhi* had gone and had come back again. Pym is capable, I say, of taking Verena out."

"You may be easy on this point, Sir Dace," returned Jack. "Pym does not go out in the ship: he is superseded." And he gave the heads of what had occurred.

It did not tend so please Sir Dace. Edward Pym on the high seas would be a less formidable adversary than Edward Pym on land: and perhaps in his heart of hearts Sir Dace did not really believe his daughter would become a stow-away.

"Won't you help me to find her? to *save* her?" gasped Sir Dace, in pitiful entreaty. "With this change—Pym not going out—I know not what trouble he may not draw her into. Coralie says Verena is not married; but I—Heaven help me! I know not what to think. I must find Pym this night and watch his movements, and find her if I can. You must help me."

"I will help you," said warm-hearted Jack—and he clasped hands

upon it. "I will undertake to find Pym. And, that your daughter is not on board, Sir Dace, I pass you my word."

Sir Dace stepped into the wherry again, to be rowed ashore and get home to his dinner—ordered that evening for six o'clock. In a short while Jack also quitted the ship, and went to Pym's lodgings in Ship Street. Pym was not there.

Mr. Pym had come in that afternoon, said his landlady, Mrs. Richenough, and startled her out of her seven senses; for, knowing the ship had left with the day's tide, she had supposed Mr. Pym to be then off Gravesend, or thereabouts. He told her the ship had sprung a leak and put back again. Mr. Pym had gone out, she added, after drinking a potful of strong tea.

"To sober him," thought the Captain. "Do you expect him back to sleep, Mrs. Richenough?"

"Yes, I do, sir. I took the sheets off his bed this morning, and I've just been and put 'em on again. Mr. Saxby's must be put on too, for he looked in to say he should sleep here."

Where to search for Pym, Jack did not know. Possibly he might have gone back to the ship to offer an apology, now that he was sobered. Jack was bending his steps towards it when he met Ferrar: who told him Pym had not gone back.

Jack put on his considering-cap. He hardly knew what to do, or how to find the fugitives: with Sir Dace, he deemed it highly necessary that Verena should be found.

"Have you anything particular to do to-night, Mr. Ferrar?" he suddenly asked. And Ferrar said he had not.

"Then," continued the Captain, "I wish you would search for Pym." And, knowing Ferrar was thoroughly trustworthy, he whispered a few confidential words of Sir Dace Fontaine's fear and trouble. "I am going to look for him myself," added Jack, "though I'm sure I don't know in what quarter. If you do come across him, keep him within view. You can tell him also that his place on the *Rose of Delhi* is filled up, and he must take his things out of her."

Altogether that had been a somewhat momentous day for Mr. Alfred Saxby—and its events for him were not over yet. He had been appointed to a good ship, and the ship had made a false start, and was back again. An uncle and aunt of his lived at Clapham, and he thought he could not do better than go down there and regale them with the news: we all naturally burn to impart marvels to the world, you know. However, when he reached his relatives' residence, he found they were out; and not long after nine o'clock he was back at Mrs. Richenough's.

"Is Mr. Pym in?" he asked of the landlady; who came forward rubbing her eyes as though she were sleepy, and gave him his candle.

"Oh, he have been in some little time, sir. And a fine row he's

been having with his skipper," added Mrs. Richenough, who sometimes came off the high ropes of politeness when she had disposed of her supper beer.

"A row, has he!" returned Saxby. "Does not like to have been superseded," he added to himself. "I must say Pym was a fool to-day—to go and drink, as he did, and to sauce the master."

"Screeching out at one another like mad, they've been," pursued Mrs. Richenough. "He do talk stern, that skipper, for a young man and a good-looking one."

"Is the Captain in there now?"

"For all I know: I did think I heard the door shut, but it might have been my fancy. Good-night, sir. Pleasant dreams."

Leaving the candle in Saxby's hands, she returned to her kitchen, which was built out at the back. He halted at the parlour door to listen. No voices were to be heard then; no sounds.

"Pym may have gone to bed—I daresay his head aches," thought Saxby: and he opened the door to see whether the parlour was empty.

Why! what was it?—what was the matter? The young man took one startled look around and then put down the candle, his heart leaping into his mouth.

The lamp on the table threw its bright light on the little room. Some scuffle appeared to have taken place in it. A chair was overturned; the ivory ornament with its glass shade had been swept from its stand to the floor: and by its side lay Edward Pym—dead.

Mr. Alfred Saxby, third mate of that good ship, the *Rose of Delhi*, might be a sufficiently self-possessed individual when encountering sudden surprises at sea; but he certainly did not show himself to be one on shore. When the state of affairs had sufficiently impressed itself on his startled senses, he burst out of the room in mortal terror, shouting out "murder."

There was nobody in the house to hear him but Mrs. Richenough. She came forward, slightly overcome by drowsiness; but the sight she saw woke her up effectually.

"Good mercy!" cried she, running to the prostrate man. "Is he dead?"

"He looks dead," shivered Mr. Saxby, hardly knowing whether he was not dead himself.

They raised Pym's head, and put a pillow under it. The landlady wrung her hands.

"We must have a doctor," she cried: "but I can see he is dead. This comes of that quarrel with his captain: I heard them raving frightfully at one another. There has been a scuffle here—see that chair. Oh! and look at my beautiful ivory knocked down!—and the shade all broke to atoms!"

"I'll fetch Mr. Ferrar," cried Saxby, feeling himself rather powerless to act; and with nobody to aid him but the gabbling woman.

Like mad, Saxby tore up the street, burst in at Mark Ferrar's open door and went full butt against Mark himself; who was at the moment turning quickly out of it.

"Take care, Saxby. What are you about?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake do come, Mr. Ferrar! Pym is dead. He is lying dead on the floor."

The first thing Ferrar did was to scan his junior officer narrowly, wondering whether he could be quite sober. Yes, he seemed to be that; but agitated to trembling, and his face as pale as death. The next minute Ferrar was bending over Pym. Alas, he saw too truly that life was extinct.

"It's his skipper that has done it, sir," repeated the landlady.

"Hush, Mrs. Richenough!" rebuked Ferrar. "Captain Tanerton has not done this."

"But I heard 'em screeching and howling at one another, sir," persisted Mrs. Richenough. "Their quarrel must have come to blows."

"I do not believe it," dissented Ferrar. "Captain Tanerton would not be capable of anything of the kind. Fight with a man who has served under him!—you don't understand things, Mrs. Richenough."

Saxby had run for the nearest medical man. Ferrar ran to find his captain. He knew that Captain Tanerton intended to put up at a small hotel in the Minories for the night.

To this hotel went Ferrar, and found Captain Tanerton. Tired with his evening's search after Pym, the Captain was taking some refreshment, before going up to Sir Dace Fontaine's—which he had promised, in Sir Dace's anxiety, to do. He received Ferrar's report—that Pym was dead—with incredulity: did not appear to believe it: but he betrayed no embarrassment, or any other guilty sign.

"Why, I came straight here from Pym," he observed. "It's hardly twenty minutes since I left him. He was all right then—except that he had been having more drink."

"Old Mother Richenough says, sir, that Pym and you had a loud quarrel."

"Says that, does she," returned the Captain carelessly. "Her ears must have deceived her, Mr. Ferrar."

"A quarrel and fight she says, sir. I told her I knew better."

Captain Tanerton took his cap and started with Ferrar for Ship Street, plunging into a reverie. Presently he began to speak—as if he wished to account for his own movements.

"When you left me, Mr. Ferrar—you know"—and here he exchanged a significant glance with his new first mate—"I went on to Ship Street, and took a look at Pym's room. A lamp was shining on the table, and his landlady had the window open, closing the shutters. This gave me an opportunity of seeing inside. Pym I saw; but not—not anyone else."

Again Captain Tanerton's tone was significant. Ferrar appeared

to understand it perfectly. It looked as though they had some secret understanding between them which they did not care to talk of openly. The Captain resumed.

"After fastening the shutters, Mrs. Richenough came to the door—for a breath of air, she remarked, as she saw me: and she positively denied, in answer to my questions, that any young lady was there. Mr. Pym had never had a young lady come after him at all, she protested, whether sister or cousin, or what not."

"Yes, sir," said Ferrar: for the Captain had paused.

"I went in, and spoke to Pym. But, I saw in a moment that he had been drinking again. He was not in a state to be reasoned with, or talked to. I asked him but one question, and asked it civilly: would he tell me where Verena Fontaine was. Pym replied in an unwilling tone; he was evidently sulky. Verena Fontaine was at home again with her people; and he had not been able, for that reason, to see her. Thinking the ship had gone away, and he with it, Verena had returned home early in the afternoon. That was the substance of his answer."

"But I—I don't know whether that account can be true, sir," hesitated Ferrar. "I was not sure, you know, sir, that it was the young lady; I said so——"

"Yes, yes, I understood that," interrupted the Captain quickly. "Well, it was what Pym said to me," he added, after a pause: "one hardly knows what to believe. However, she was not there, so far as I could ascertain and judge; and I left Pym and came up here to my hotel. I was not two minutes with him."

"Then—did no quarrel take place, sir?" cried Ferrar, thinking of the landlady's story.

"Not an angry word."

At this moment, as they were turning into Ship Street, Saxby, who seemed completely off his head, ran full tilt against Ferrar. It was all over, he cried out in excitement, as he turned back with them: the doctor pronounced Pym to be really dead.

"It is a dreadful thing," said the Captain. "And, seemingly, a mysterious one."

"Oh, it is dreadful," asserted young Saxby. "What will poor Miss Verena do? I saw her just now," he added, dropping his voice.

"Saw her where?" asked the Captain, taking a step backwards.

"In the place where I've just met you, sir," replied Saxby. "I was running past round the corner into the street, on my way home from Clapham, when a young lady met and passed me, going pretty nearly as quick as I was. She had her face muffled in a black veil, but I am nearly sure it was Miss Verena Fontaine. I thought she must be coming from Pym's lodgings here."

Captain Tanerton and his chief mate exchanged glances of intelligence under the light of the street gas-lamp. The former then turned to Saxby.

"Mr. Saxby," said he, "I would advise you not to mention this little incident. It would not, I am sure, be pleasant to Miss Verena Fontaine's friends to hear of it. And, after all, you are not sure that it was she."

"Very true, sir," replied Saxby. "I'll not speak of it again."

"You hear, sir," answered Ferrar softly, as Saxby stepped on to open the house door. "This seems to bear out what I said. And, by the way, sir, I also saw——"

"Hush!" cautiously interrupted the Captain—for they had reached the door, and Mrs. Richenough stood at it.

And what Mr. Ferrar further saw, whatever it might be, was not heard by Captain Tanerton. There was no present opportunity for private conversation: and Ferrar was away in the morning with the *Rose of Delhi*.

III.

AFTER parting with Captain Tanerton on leaving the ship, I made my way to the Mansion House, took an omnibus to Covent Garden, and called at the Tavistock to tell Mr. Brandon of the return of the ship. Mr. Brandon kept me to dinner. About eight o'clock I left him, and went to the Marylebone Road to see the Fontaines. Coralie was in the drawing-room alone.

"Is it you, Johnny Ludlow!" she gaily cried, when old Ozias showed me in. "You are as welcome as flowers in May. Here I am, without a soul to speak to. You must have a game at chess with me."

"Your sister is not come home, then?"

"Not she. I thought it likely she would come, as soon as the ship's head was turned seaward—I told you so. But she has not. And now the ship's back again, I hear. A fine time you must have had of it!"

"We just had. But how did you know?"

"From papa. Papa betook himself to the docks this afternoon, to assure himself, I presume, that the *Rose of Delhi* was gone. And my belief is, Johnny, that he will work himself into a nervous fever," Coralie broke off to say, in her equable way, as she helped me to place the pieces. "When he got there, he found the ship was back again. This put him out a little, as you may judge; and something else put him out more. He heard that Vera went on board with Pym yesterday afternoon when the ship was lying in St. Katharine's Docks. Upon that, what notion do you suppose he took up?—I have first move, don't I?"

"Certainly. What notion did he take up?" The reader must remember that I knew nothing of Sir Dace's visit to the ship.

"Why, that Vera might be resolving to convert herself into a stow-away, and go out with Pym and the ship. Poor papa! He went searching all over the vessel. He must be off his head."

"Verena would not do that."

"Do it!" retorted Coralie. "She'd be no more likely to do it than to go up a chimney, as the sweeps do. I told papa so. He brought me this news when he came home to dinner. And he might just as well have stayed away, for all he ate."

Coralie paused to look at her game. I said nothing.

"He could only drink. It was as if he had a fierce thirst upon him. When the sweets came on, he left the table and shut himself in his little library. I sent Ozias to ask if he would have a cup of tea or coffee made; papa swore at poor Ozias, and locked the door upon him. When Verena does appear I'd not say but he'll beat her."

"No, no : not that."

"But, I tell you he is off his head. He is still shut up : and nobody dare go near him when he gets into a fit of temper. It is so silly of papa ! Verena is all right. But this disobedience, you see, is something new to him."

"You can't move that bishop. It leaves your king in check."

"So it does. The worst item of news remains behind," added Coralie. "And that is that Pym does not sail with the ship."

"I should not think he would now. Captain Tanerton would not take him."

"Papa told me Captain Tanerton had caused him to be superseded. Was Pym very much the worse for what he took, Johnny ? Was he very insolent ? You must have seen it all ?"

"He had taken quite enough. And he was about as insolent as a man can be."

"Ferrar is appointed to his place, papa says ; and a new man to Ferrar's."

"Ferrar is ! I am glad of that ; very. He deserves to get on."

"But Ferrar is not a gentleman, is he ?" objected Coralie.

"Not in one sense. There are gentlemen and gentlemen. Mark Ferrar is very humble as regards birth and bringing-up. His father is a journeyman china-painter at one of the Worcester china factories ; and Mark got his learning at St. Peter's charity-school. But every instinct Mark possesses is that of a refined, kindly, modest gentleman ; and he has contrived to improve himself so greatly by dint of study and observation, that he might now pass for a gentleman in any society. Some men, whatever may be their later advantages, can never throw off the common tone and manner of early habits and associations. Ferrar has succeeded in doing it."

"If Pym stays on shore it may bring us further complication," mused Coralie. "I should search for Verena myself then—and search in earnest. Papa and old Ozias have gone about it in anything but a likely manner."

"Have you any notion where she can be ?"

"Just the least bit of notion in the world," laughed Coralie. "It flashed across me the other night where she might have hidden herself. I don't know it. I have no particular ground to go upon."

"You did not tell Sir Dace?"

"Not I," lightly answered Coralie. "We two sisters don't interfere with one another's private affairs. I did keep back a letter of Vera's; one she wrote to Pym when we first left home; but I have done no more. Here comes some tea at last!"

"I should have told," I continued in a low tone. "Or taken means myself to see whether my notion was right or wrong."

"What did it signify?—when Pym was going away in a day or two. Check to you, Johnny Ludlow."

That first game, what with talking and tea-drinking, was a long one. I won it. When Ozias came in for the tea-cups Coralie asked him whether Sir Dace had rung for anything. No, the man answered; most likely his master would remain locked in till bedtime; it was his way when any great thing put him out.

"I don't think I can stay for another game," I said to Coralie, as she began to place the men again.

"Are you in such a hurry?" cried Coralie, glancing round at the clock: which said twenty minutes to ten.

I was not in any hurry at all that night, as regarded myself: I had thought she might not care for me to stay longer. Miss Deveen and Cattledon had gone out to dinner some ten miles away, and were not expected home before midnight. So we began a fresh game.

"Why! that clock must have stopped!"

Chancing to look at it by-and-by, I saw that it stood at the same time—twenty minutes to ten. I took out my watch. It said just ten minutes past ten.

"What does it signify?" said Coralie. "You can stay here till twenty minutes to twelve if you like—and be whirled home in a cab by midnight then."

That was true. If —

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Coralie.

She was looking at the door with surprised eyes. There stood Verena, her bonnet on; evidently just come in.

Verena tripped forward, bent down, and kissed her sister. "Have you been desperately angry, Coral?" she lightly asked, giving me her hand to shake. "I know papa has."

"I have not been angry," was Coralie's equable answer: "but you have acted childishly, Verena. And now, where have you been?"

"Only in Woburn Place at Mrs. Ball's," said Verena, throwing off her bonnet, and bringing her lovely flushed face close to the light as she sat down. "When I left here that evening—and really, Johnny, I was sorry not to stay and go in to dinner with *you*," she broke off, with a smile—"I went straight to our old lodgings, to good old Mother Ball. 'They are frightful tyrants at home,' I said to her; 'I'm not sure but they'll serve me as Bluebeard did his wives; and I want to stay with you for a day or two.' There's where I have been all

the time, Coral; and I wondered you and papa did not come to look for me."

"It is where I fancied you might be," returned Coral. "But I only thought of it on Saturday night.—Does that mean check, Johnny?"

"Check and mate, mademoiselle."

"Oh, how wicked you are!"

"Mrs. Ball has been more careful of me than she'd be of gold," went on Vera, her blue eyes dancing. "The eldest daughter, Louise, is at home now: she teaches music in a school: and, if you'll believe me, Coral, the old mother would never let me stir out without Louise. When Edward Pym came up in the evening to take me for a walk, Louise must go with us. 'I feel responsible to your papa and sister, my dear,' the old woman would say to me. Oh, she was a veritable dragon."

"Was Louise with you when you went on board the *Rose of Delhi* yesterday afternoon?" cried Coralie, while I began to put away the chessmen.

Verena opened her eyes. "How *did* you hear of that? No, we tricked Louise for once. Edward had fifty things to say to me, and he wanted me alone. After dinner he proposed that we should go to afternoon service. I made haste, and went out with him, calling to Louise that she'd catch us up before we reached the church, and we ran off in just the contrary direction. 'I should like to show you my ship,' Edward said; and we went down in an omnibus. Mrs. Ball shook her head when we got back, and said I must never do it again. As if I should have the chance, now Edward's gone!"

Coralie glanced at her. "He *is* gone, I suppose?"

"Yes," sighed Vera. "The ship left the docks this morning. He took leave of me last night."

Coralie looked doubtful. She glanced again at her sister under her eyelids.

"Then—if Edward Pym is no longer here to take walks with you, Vera, how is it you came home so late to-night?"

"Because I have been to a concert," cried Vera, her tone as gay as a lark's. "Louise and I started to walk here this afternoon. I wanted you to see her; she is really very nice. Coming through Fitzroy Square, she called upon some friends of hers who live there, the Barretts—he is a professor of music. Mrs. Barrett was going to a concert to-night and she said if we would stay she'd take us. So we had tea with her and went to it, and they sent me home in a cab."

"You seem to be taking your pleasure!" remarked Coralie.

"I had such an adventure downstairs," cried Verena, dropping her voice after a pause of thought. "Nearly fell into the arms of papa."

"What—now?"

"Now; two minutes ago. While hesitating whether to softly tinkle the kitchen bell and smuggle myself in and up to my room, or

to storm the house with a bold summons, Ozias drew open the front door. He looked so glad to see me, poor stupid old fellow. I was talking to him in the passage when I heard papa's cough. 'Oh, hide yourself, Missee Vera,' cried Ozias, 'the master, he so angry;' and away I rushed into papa's little library, seeing the door of it open ——"

"He has come out of it, then!" interjected Coralie.

"I thought papa would go up-stairs," said Vera. "Instead of that, he came on into the room. I crept behind the old red window-curtains, and ——"

"And what?" asked Coralie, for Verena made a sudden pause.

"Groaned out with fright, and nearly betrayed myself," continued Verena. "Papa stared at the curtains as if he thought they were alive, and then and there backed out of the room. Perhaps he feared a ghost was there. He was looking so strange, Coralie."

"All your fault, child. Since the night you went away he has looked more like a maniac than a rational man, and acted like one. I have just said so to Johnny Ludlow."

"Poor papa! I will be good and tractable as an angel now, and make it up to him. And—why, Coralie, here are visitors."

We gazed in surprise. It is not usual to receive calls at bed-time. Ozias stood at the door showing in Captain Tanerton. Behind him was Alfred Saxby.

The Captain's manner was curious. No sooner did he set eyes on us than he started back, as if he thought we might bite him.

"Not here. Not the ladies. I told you it was Sir Dace, I wanted," he said in quick sentences to Ozias. "Sir Dace alone."

Ozias went back down the stairs, and they after him, and were shown into the library. It was a little room nearly opposite the front entrance, and underneath the room called the boudoir. You went down a few stairs to it.

Verena turned white. A prevision of evil seized her.

"Something must be the matter," she shivered, laying her hand upon my arm. "Did you notice Captain Tanerton's face?—I never saw him look like that. And what does he do here? Where is the ship? And oh, Johnny"—and her voice rose to a shriek—"where's Edward Pym?"

Alas! we soon knew what the matter was—and where Edward Pym was. Dead. Murdered. That's what young Saxby called it. Sir Dace, looking frightfully scared, started with them down to Ship Street. I went also; I could not keep away. George was to sit up for me at home if I were late.

"For," as Miss Deveen had said to me in the morning, laughingly, "there's no telling, Johnny, at what unearthly hour you may get back from Gravesend."

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

ABOUT NORWAY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."



NORWEGIAN "STATION."

THE system of travelling in Norway is simple and unpretending, befitting the necessities and ideas of a simple-minded people: one of whose greatest charms is an absence of that vulgar pretension which seeks every occasion for display and for surpassing its neighbours in magnificence. I do not believe anything of this sort exists in Norway.

The mode of travelling is easy and inexpensive, and, as far as it

goes, well organized. But if Norway should become a popular country with tourists: and in this advanced age, when people go north, south, east and west; when there is a perpetual thirst for something new: new emotions, new impressions, anything for excitement: when even ladies visit the Nile for a little change of air, and ride over the Rocky Mountains in undaunted solitude, and with an admirable courage given to few women: when the North-East passage has become a thing of the past, and the course of the Gulf Stream is at man's disposal: when all these changes are taking place, surely a country so near our own shores as the iron-bound coast of "Gammlle Norge," will have its day and generation; will be visited, lionized, inspected, criticized, devastated, and finally abandoned—who or what is constant in this world?—by the kings, lords, and commons of the earth.

But ere Norway has become a prey to the Philistines, let those who can, enjoy what remains of her original freshness. It will not last for ever. As long as the world turns round, the sun and moon run their course, and the law of gravitation keeps people comfortably upside down, like flies upon a ceiling, so long must effect follow upon cause. So when the pilgrims of pleasure begin to invade Norway, as they do Switzerland and other lands favoured by Nature, one of her great charms will have ceased to be.

True, the sea will still beat upon her shores with its everlasting refrain, chanting its endless hymn to Nature: a wordless Memento Mori which involuntarily directs the mind to that other sea, into whose turbulent waves each must plunge, on his way to the Dark Valley leading us to eternal sunlight. The sea, I say, will continue to beat upon these shores; the great hills, with their endless undulations, their cloud-capped peaks, will still be fraught with their solemn, chilling, mysterious, yet attracting silence and solitude; the wind will whisper its endless monotonies to the pine forests: and the cattle "upon a thousand hills"—a true description of this land—will still answer to the jodel cry of the peasant: but the endless stream of travellers, with their irritating, restless ways, their loud tones, their misplaced remarks—the vacant laugh and foolish exclamation, so often breaking in upon the most solemn grandeur—will mock the dignity of this lonely country, and desecrate its repose.

And its people will change: their characters, aims, ambitions. It is, I repeat, effect following cause: as surely as the ebb and flow of the tide, the return of the swallows.

And yet it is impossible to go about Norway, and not doubt whether it ever can or will become popular with the great army of invaders. Beyond fishing—an art which appeals to the few and not the many—there is not a very great deal to take them there in comparison with other countries: and there is a great deal *not* there that may be found elsewhere.

The traveller has frequently to give up everything in the shape of comfort and luxuries: he must exert himself, too; often travel under difficulties; go through days of rain and cold, or submit to be detained at some lonely road-side station where life becomes a burden and man a misanthrope. There is no falling luxuriously into a corner of your comfortably built chariot, and having a nap if drowsiness overtakes you on the road. An upright position and sharp look-out keep you awake whether you will or not.

In these days, when, if there is no royal road to learning, people like one in travelling—and, more often than not, have it—hardships, and bodily exertion, and, it may sometimes happen, nothing but a supply of black bread at the end of a long day's journey, to appease a wolf-like appetite, are not universally attractive, and will never be universally sought.

Unless, indeed, things change. Things do change; and not always gradually. We often run from one extreme to the other. We cannot say that the world is what it was even twenty years ago. I heard two sermons yesterday from thoughtful, eloquent men. The one said we were awaking to a better state of things. The religion of twenty, a hundred, three hundred years past, would not do now. He was glad of it. The other held an opposite opinion. He considered that in many things religious we were retrograding:

going from bad to worse. This he regretted. Each might be right, but each looked at it from his own point of view. In either case it was clear that things were changing.

Ladies, again, now go up for Cambridge examinations: they make themselves conspicuous and invade man's provinces. They talk on platforms and "embrace" professions. Law and physic are open to them—and the Church, as tender lay sisters to attractive curates, who part their hair down the middle, perfume their handkerchiefs, and advise auricular confession. Ladies are quite at home in the dissecting room—and no doubt very much at home with the students. Probably they will tell you this is only another of their modes of "embracing" a profession. So be it. But our wiser forefathers-and-mothers had an old-fashioned idea that a girl's kingdom was her home, her best gifts grace and modesty, her greatest charm a feminine mind. It only remains for ladies, Leap-year or not, to propose to gentlemen. And then, where shall we find peace on the earth?

But at this rate, we shall not get through Norway. Digressions, like the poor little muffin bell, ought to be put down by act of parliament, for the benefit of the over-scrupulous reader.

The present system of posting in Norway—our paper reminds us of a sermon that is divided into a number of heads but does not vary its theme—would never do for an influx of visitors—the Philistines already alluded to. Therefore they had better keep away. There is a certain sound of luxurious dignity about this same word, posting, quite out of character with the thing itself, as found in Norway. In England it suggests a handsome carriage and pair; a post-boy gorgeous in livery and not infrequently great in self-esteem. In Norway it is a simple little carriole, with one small horse: rope "ribbons," which you must handle yourself; and very often a small post-boy, not yet in his teens by some years, who sits upon your luggage, and, for all you know, is amusing himself by making faces at you behind your back.

The price of posting is about threepence for every English mile. A Norwegian land mile is seven English miles, a fact that must not be forgotten by the traveller. Inexpensive as it sounds, and is, for one or two persons alone, it mounts up considerably if several are journeying together and the funds all flow from one exchequer. Thus a paterfamilias may be travelling with five animated appendages, his sisters, cousins, and a female aunt—which does not always mean, in these days, a *feminine* aunt. Or perhaps he is blessed with five well-grown olive branches. As they must travel with six carriages, the sum mounts up to eighteen-pence per English mile: and as, the country being large, many miles have to be traversed, it becomes, in the end, an item not to be passed over in what our old friend Owen would have described to Bailie Nicol Jarvie as "the total of the whole."

The "stations" are at distances of from seven to ten miles, more or less, from each other. If you are anxious to push on, you must take care to get up early in the morning so as to be in advance of other people on the road. Even then you may find that a party



OLD BRIDGE IN THE MOUNTAINS.

of travellers have slept at a station farther on, and stolen a march upon you. In that case you may be detained one, two, or three, or even more hours at many stations. A fast station is bound to keep five horses, a slow station three: therefore if five people are ahead of you and all the horses are out, you must await their return.

This is often tedious work. It may be a station surrounded by

beautiful scenery, in which you are not unwilling to linger: but it may be the contrary, and the station itself comfortless, and destitute even of a glass of milk or beer. Moreover, in travelling, especially in Norway, each day has its appointed work: so many miles and stations for so many days: and this daily work cannot be accomplished if delays are frequent. Travelling is complicated and troublesome from the fact that you often have to time yourself to catch a steamer at a certain place; and as many of these steamers start only once or twice a week, arriving an hour after its departure means a delay of several days, and your plan is, like the world



ON THE ROAD TO LAERDAL.

upon occasion, thrown all out of joint. It is true that delays at stations may in a great measure be avoided by sending on before you "Forbud"—an avant-courier: but this does not always answer, and it is an additional cost that everyone does not care to encounter. It may often be noticed, with surprise at the uneven balance of mind, how travellers will waste considerable sums over really worthless objects bought in the shape of so-called "souvenirs," and will screw down their necessary expenses to the very last fraction, making themselves perfectly uncomfortable, and certainly not leaving behind them a character for generosity. This is as bad a fault as that lavishness so much practised by Americans and a certain class of English, which has done so much real harm abroad. Extremes are better avoided.

And now, en route.

We left Sörum on the Wednesday morning in company with kind good Mr. and Miss B., who headed the procession: Miss B.'s hood, it has already been recorded, occasionally swelling out to the resemblance and dimensions of a huge chimney cowl, turned hither and thither by the wind, as she gazed about her. They occupied the *stolkjaer* (pronounced *stolecar*), and we followed in carriages. There were two post-boys for the three conveyances; and the next station, Lindheian, was at a distance of half a Norwegian mile, or three and a half English miles.

Now began our first experience of Norwegian "posting," their organized systems, their way of doing things. It was at first unfamiliar and somewhat incomprehensible. Not speaking the language, we could make no enquiries: and but for Mr. and Miss B., who explained many mysteries, the increase of our knowledge would have been attended by doubts, difficulties, and errors. Yet, like the puzzle of the egg, it is all very simple when once mastered. Our troubles would have chiefly arisen from the fact of starting on a somewhat unbeaten track, where things and people were in all their native simplicity.

Our present road was narrow but very picturesque. Close upon us to our left were the mountains, grand and beautiful, covered with trees and tangle, wild flowers and ferns adorning the banks by the road-side. Upon the slopes the wild strawberry plant grew and flourished in profusion, for it is very general in Norway as in many other mountainous countries. When the fruit is ripe, small children wander into the hills and gather them, and as the traveller passes the little road-side huts, out they come and hold them forth, hoping to tempt him out of a few örer. This strawberry selling and more direct systems of begging the Government desire may be encouraged as little as possible.

But the small strawberry urchins, their little faces and hands stretched forth in mute appeal—often a more eloquent pleading than words—formed a picture hard to be withstood. It was easy enough to pass the fruit—you cannot perform a sort of perambulating picnic in a carriage—but almost impossible not to satisfy the hope of a slight response shining in those bright eyes, and often very dirty faces. Nevertheless, it is unwise. One well-known village has been half ruined through an Englishman who some little time ago spent a few months there, fishing in the neighbourhood, and amused himself of an evening by throwing örer from his window to the boys in the road, for the slight pleasure of seeing them scramble. You cannot visit that place now without being worried by men and boys, who boldly come up and ask you to give them money.

As is often the case, after an early rainy morning, the day was brilliantly fine, and with the freshness of the air our spirits rose to fair-weather point. Mr. B. grew quite youthful and excited, but

irritated A. by what the latter looked upon as very slow driving and frequent pauses. Yet we went over the ground that morning as well as at any after period. A. had yet to learn that four miles an hour is generally the utmost speed to be got out of the horses. Anything much beyond this is immediately checked by the post-boy, in the most uncompromising manner.

The love of these people for their horses is a great feature in their character, and a good one. They treat them with the most tender kindness and consideration; and resent, as far as they dare or can, the slightest approach to illtreatment. Not that many would be guilty of cruelty; but a stranger to the country is apt to forget the hilly nature of the roads, and that frequent urging would soon put an end to these strong, willing, and amiable little animals: amongst whose faults, however, must be reckoned a general and unpleasant habit of shying.

We passed through the narrow lane amidst the mountains on either side, the wild tangles and the fir trees. To our right ran the noisy river, now near at hand, now winding farther away, but never quite parting company. Frothy, rippling, rushing, it seemed a living thing amidst dense solitude. Miss B.'s hood collapsed like a rent balloon, until at last she threw it off altogether, and cast round at us a half-shy, half-amused look, evidently aware that she now presented a more coquettish appearance. Dear lady! harmless vanity was evidently—and properly—not dead in her. Nor should it be in anyone. When not carried to excess it inspires a woman with the wish to please, whence flows the endeavour. With those frivolous young creatures whose lives are made up of overweening conceit, who pass their time in following the latest fashion and making themselves into a burlesque of life, we have no concern.

At the end of an hour's drive we reached Lindheian, alighted, entered the station, inspected the rooms upstairs and down, and enjoyed Miss B.'s amusement at the papers on the walls, where extraordinary battles were being for ever fought, guns were continually fired, and great slaughter lay around. Had we passed the night there, according to our original plan, we should doubtless have had nothing to regret. But the scenery around Sörum was much finer and more open: and even when night shuts out the mountains, we still feel and know that they are there, and the effect remains.

The people at Lindheian were civil, the landlord especially so. In front of the house rose the mountains, and up the slopes went a boy in search of horses. In a short time he brought them down from some invisible recess. The luggage was strapped on to the fresh carriages—we had now one a-piece—the post-boys from Sörum were paid and dismissed, and nothing remained but to sign the book.

A day-book is kept at every station. Each traveller, before leaving, or the representative of a party, is compelled therein to put

down every name, and the number of horses engaged. By this means the succeeding party can ascertain how many horses are out, and misrepresentation on the part of the landlord becomes difficult. Some would make excuses if they could, and now and then try it on at night, in order to detain travellers and make money by them. Complaints against a station may also be recorded in these books, and the *Lensmand*—a sort of official constable or perambulating magistrate—in his appointed rounds, consults the book, takes note of them, and punishes the offenders.

In about twenty minutes from our arrival at Lindheian we were off again. Mr. B. being a Norwegian, could hasten their movements in a persuasive manner; but after we separated they kept us waiting



SAETER HOME IN THE MOUNTAINS.

often an hour at some of the stations, when in five minutes everything could have been ready. And you are helpless. Offend them by the slightest remonstrance, or the most polite request for a little more speed, and they retaliate by keeping you waiting the longer.

Amongst the healthiest and most praiseworthy features in Norway are the new and excellent roads to be found all over the land, constructed with great skill, labour, and cost. In a poor country this is a very great work. Over and over again we were astonished at the good roads in hilly passes; roads passing by rushing torrents, or overhanging, as it were, the mountain-side, or skirting precipices and rendering smooth and pleasant a journey that would otherwise, have been lengthened and laborious.

As we left Lindheian, a cavalcade of four carriages, with one lady to enliven the party, the old road might be traced going up the mountain-side, steep and rugged, making in the old days a toil of pleasure—as all travelling then was in Norway. It was now used as

a saeter path, said Mr. B. : conducting to the summer homes in the mountains, answering to the Swiss alm, when the cattle are away grazing, and the girls or the young men are looking after them. The saeters are small, rude huts, peat smoked, often blackened inside and out, constructed of logs and planks of wood, and affording sufficient shelter for the warm seasons and the long days.

We bowled along, more figuratively than literally. No sooner did we get up speed, than the short bit of down hill or level road abruptly ceased, and Mr. B. coming to a dead stand at the bottom of the next ascent, would bring up the remainder of the party with a suddenness dangerous to an upright position. For the Norwegian horses have this peculiarity : that the first horse regulates the speed,



THE BAEGNA.

and the others follow suit. If he goes slowly, so do they; if he goes fast, they, too, become more lively. The one horse will have his nose as close to the carriole in front of him as possible. Now and then, indeed, the advance guard feels a sudden dig in his back, and on looking round is confronted by the horse's mouth, which is unpleasantly affectionate in its demonstrations. It is troublesome: for whilst the foremost horse has continually to be urged onwards, the other horses require quite as much to be held in. The occupier of the front carriole thus fills an unthankful position. To those behind he appears to be a very slow coach indeed; arresting speed, spoiling fun, and dragging onwards in a miserable manner. He is a victim, almost a martyr; his followers constantly urging him on to greater exertions, which are perfectly unavailing. He feels that he is momentarily losing the good-will of his companions. Four miles an hour is what few men appreciate. It is no better than

walking, say they, and really almost as tiring. What they like is to go ahead, and rush through a country. Here is a fall and there a hill; but one fall or one hill very much resembles another, they consider. The only real pleasure in travelling, they argue, is the excitement of getting along, passing quickly from place to place, and having a sort of race with time.

Unlucky Mr. B. came in that morning for his share of the burden. A. at last got tired of the walking pace and frequent stoppages, and declared he would take the lead. But, unfortunately, though his horse had kept uncomfortably close up, it was so humble-minded that it absolutely refused to pass and go in front. For once A. had to make a virtue of necessity and practise resignation.

Well he might, indeed, for the scene was of a picturesque beauty uncommon to English eyes. The road wound in and out amongst the hills, which were broken up into chains and undulations; some bleak and bare, and presenting a mere rock surface; others covered with firs that looked fresh and green after the morning rain, less gloomy than usual in the dazzling air and bright sunshine. Those wonderful pine forests, the very sombreness of whose aspect makes them so unchangeably grand. Gloomy and sad they may be; there is not the rustle and sparkle about them that you find in the spreading and more friendly branches of the elm; but they are very constant, never changing, ever the same.

During the whole of that ten miles' drive we never met a being or passed a creature, biped or quadruped. Solitude, eternal solitude seemed to reign—utter, uninterrupted solitariness; as much on the road below as on the mountain heights. I have never felt so out of the world, in a sense so cast adrift upon an unknown, uninhabited land, as during that first day's journeying. There were neither landmarks nor sign-posts to guide us: in a few hours we should have parted company with kind, obliging, sympathetic Mr. and Miss B., and then, thrown on our own resources, we must resign ourselves to whatever destiny might have in store for us.

At length we turned out of the road, to the right, and in a small open space, a hundred yards or so down, we came to the station of Storsveen.

I then thought, and looking backward, I think still, that this station must be one of the roughest and most primitive in all Norway. Were I to see it again, after the experience which followed of other stations, I might form a different opinion, though I fancy not. Anything more dreary and desolate, more aboriginal than it appeared, could not be conceived. It stood in the midst of this small plain, surrounded by the mountains, no sound save the flowing of the river on its course; no house in sight but the station itself; not even a bird to break the mournful sense of stagnation. We seemed verily to have reached the end of all things and of the world.

But Mr. B.'s unfailing youthful ardour did not forsake him even

here. It was equal to any emergency, and seemed to take things as they came; being, like a second Mark Tapley, most jovial under the severest strain. He sprang lightly out of his carriage, cut a caper in the air to restore suspended circulation, and then came up and asked us how we found ourselves, and what we thought of Storsveen, of carriages, and of all things Norwegian. It was impossible to resist this light-hearted nature, who took everybody under his wing, and had patted all the little boys' heads on the journey from Heen to Sörum: and so, stimulated by his good example, we too skipped gracefully out of our carriages, and going up to Miss B., assisted her to unpack and alight from her vehicle. It was delightful to witness the pleasure with which Mr. B. received any attentions paid to his sister—who was just one of those persons to whom it was impossible *not* to be attentive, and even solicitous for her comfort.

Storsveen is not a sleeping station, as far as I know; I may be mistaken. But I do know that I should not like to sleep in the midst of that appalling solitude, as far removed from the world as if I were in the centre of the Great Sahara. Accommodation was of the most limited description. It was past two o'clock, and a not very sumptuous breakfast in the early morning had paved the way for a ravenous-like appetite. Oh for a dish of that fine trout Miss B. had shown me with such pride at ten o'clock! If we had only known what awaited us! If only in this life we could always see the end from the beginning and foretell the future!—how much good would be done, what mistakes avoided! But we could not see even a day before us, and so the trout were left in peace at Sörum. Here we found nothing forthcoming but a supply of black bread, a little goat's cheese, and some not especially good beer. When we asked for further supplies, the mistress of the establishment looked vacantly at us, then mysteriously whispered to her husband, and finally shook her head in a melancholy way. It was evident that here, to ask and to have was by no means the rule of the house.

Black bread is of two kinds in Norway. There is one sort that is brown, sour, and yet not altogether unpalatable; and there is a stage farther on, to which limits English appetite at any rate cannot extend. A. could manage neither one nor the other, and throughout Norway eked out a bare existence upon hard biscuit. As for goat's cheese, here and in other parts of Norway it looked and smelt exactly like hard, brown soap: I never had the courage to taste it. Miss B., whose capacities for fasting were great, refused anything in the way of refreshment: necessity compelled us to be less dainty.

The house, as all these stations are, was built of wood. We entered a rough, long room almost bare of furniture, which sent forth a chilling influence, and found the day-book. Then we went into the kitchen, which was strewn with green branches of trees, a frequent custom in Norway, which sent forth a sweet, resinous perfume. In the large chimney-corner, to the left hand as we entered, a rough,

stalwart handmaiden was boiling something in a cauldron—what, we stayed not to enquire. In this out-of-the-world spot it was as well not to be too inquisitive.

Above the outhouse to the right of the main building, was a small bell-tower, or shed, and the bell is principally used to call the people down from the mountains. At such times the tones vibrate through the air and penetrate to distant parts of the hills, sounding an alarm sufficient to arouse from their long sleep those who are quietly resting after the burden and heat of their little day in the churchyard hard by. Not that the bell was a large one, but in these quiet neighbourhoods, these great solitudes, sounds are tenfold magnified.

The people of the station, to be just, were far better than their quarters, and were anxious to do their utmost for us during our short stay amongst them. But you cannot make bricks without straw, and what they did not possess, the best will in the world was unable to produce. So, with neither time, inclination, nor inducement to linger, we got ready again for the road. We had still far to travel, and at our present rate it was difficult to say at what hour we should reach our destination. One thing, however, we had already learned: that the system of travelling in Norway was never made for those who are pressed for time.

So we paid the post-boys from Lindheian, watched them depart with their empty carriages, and then ourselves prepared to follow suit. We left the kitchen with its pleasant smell of pinewood, and the girl who had never moved from her mysterious ministrations at the cauldron, swallowed a little of their black bread and beer, and went out. Mr. B. superintended the strapping the luggage, about which he was as anxious as a lady is for the safe keeping of her bonnet-box; made them envelop our portmanteau in a sack to protect it from the mud on the road: and away we, too, went on our journey.

We had seven miles to travel to the next station, Vold: seven miles of the same fine scenery, the same grand, utter solitude, the vast hills and lonely mountain heights; and then, after nearly two hours, another stage was accomplished.

Vold was very differently situated from Storsveen. We had not to go out of the way to reach it, but found it perched on the roadside in a mountain nook, surrounded and overhung, as it seemed, by the trees and tangles that grew upon the slopes. There was a close unpleasant feeling about it of being shut in; a want of air; a longing to get out into more expansive quarters. The house itself was picturesque; it was built something after the style of a Swiss chalet, and we entered by the gable end. But the people were less obliging and civil than those of Storsveen. The spot seemed to breathe a veritable air of mystery, which no doubt was all imagination, but had all the effect of reality upon nerves beginning to get tired with the long, unfamiliar drive, the slow progress, in itself wearisome, the want of one's ordinary food. I simply could not have stayed the night in that place. A ner-

vousness took possession of me, which no one suspected ; that kind of feeling which passes on to presentiment, and which made me heartily respond to Mr. B.'s proposal that we should not linger here longer than was necessary. Had we done so ; dined and slept there ; no doubt we should have found Vold comfortable, and the people attentive ; but our journey was far from being over for the day ; time was precious ; horses and carriages could be ready at once, whilst to prepare dinner would take an hour. So again we made martyrs of ourselves, and went on our way—fasting.

Once more, therefore, and for the last time all four together, we started. The road became still more wild and picturesque than heretofore. The Baegna now went rushing and roaring in turbulent haste and strong force over its rocky bed, deepening as the road ascended. Trees overhung us ; masses of tangle, slopes of wild flowers and the delicate green of the oak-fern continued to abound. Rugged grandeur



NEAR SÖRUM.

surrounded us wherever the eye rested. In about a quarter of an hour we reached the bridge over the Baegna, where we were to part with our kind friends. Our road would now lie to the left ; theirs onwards to the right. Miss B. was on her way to spend a month or two with friends, who—it seemed to us—must live on the very confines of the earth : and Mr. B., leaving his sister in safe keeping, would continue his journey to Bergen. There he hoped we should meet again.

It chanced that we never did meet again. And here, in taking leave of them, though these pages may not come under their notice, I would express my gratitude for their more than kindness and consideration towards two travellers in a strange land : and what was still more embarrassing, in the midst of an unknown tongue. So far they had made all the difference to our journey ; future progress would, in consequence, be comparatively plain sailing.

We fell, too, soon after this, into the more beaten tracks of travellers, where complications need not be ; where the station

people often spoke a little English: and travellers' wants were so much alike, that without being uttered they were understood. But so desolate and forlorn, so out of the way and out of the world, so leading to chaos and confusion seemed that first day's experience, that, without the support of Mr. B.'s kindly guidance and Miss B.'s bright countenance to enliven and relieve these apparently untrodden paths, I doubt if we should have had the courage to proceed. Untrodden paths indeed! From eleven in the morning until five in the afternoon, when we parted, we passed no creature on the road, heard no sound of voices save our own, saw no sign of life, with the exception of the slight breaks at the stations, and the few people inhabiting them.

We parted from our friends at five o'clock, at the foot of the Baegna bridge, through which the water was rushing with passionate haste and loud noise, foam upon foam. Mr. B. was full of farewells, and shook hands at least a dozen different times, and Miss B. waved her hand and occasionally looked back until quite out of sight. Everything about her was gentle; voice, step, movement, and expression; and this, added to what must once have been considerable beauty, and was beauty still, made one wonder why, in the years gone by, she had not ceased to be an unappropriated blessing.

So they departed and we saw them no more. I had like to have taken leave of Norway at the same time, and of life with it. Nothing would satisfy my horse but that he must follow the carriages containing our lost companions. Endeavours to make him take the proper road were useless. He backed, plunged, reared, turned round, and was within an inch of precipitating himself and his driver over the steep banks into the rushing water below. For one moment I realized the feeling of a near and overwhelming danger: my heart stood still; and, luckily, so did the horse. Then his mind took a sudden turn for the better; he put his head down and plunged to the left—the left road proving the right road in this instance, though it is not always so through life. Away he dashed, and A.'s quadruped came trotting after. We might have compared ourselves to the Children in the Wood: children of a larger growth, it is true: but here were forests innumerable, if not the leaves and the robins: whilst those unhappy little beings, whose fate has rent the heart and harrowed the feelings of childhood from generation to generation, could not have found themselves in greater solitude and a more forsaken country than now surrounded us on all sides.

DAYLESFORD.

A STORY OF OXFORD DAYS.

I.

DAYLESFORD.

I WENT to Oxford at nineteen, pretty well acquainted with books, but as ignorant as the merest child of any knowledge of the world. My father, a country clergyman, who had led a most secluded life, and married late, had a horror of public schools, for he had been wretched at Eton. He had, therefore, educated me himself; and I had thus no opportunity of gathering from intercourse with society any of the advantages of which my education deprived me: for we lived in a small West-Country village, in a neighbourhood purely agricultural.

My father sent me to his own college, St. Ambrose's. Having been brought up at home, I had, naturally, no school acquaintances ready to welcome me into their circle. A few soon called on me, and these not of the best set or style. I was, fortunately, fastidious in my tastes, and contracted no intimacies: nor, with one exception, did I feel inclined to make any.

During my first term I saw a man, called Daylesford, who took my fancy mightily at first sight. He was a couple of years my senior: tall, handsome, and dark-haired, with sparkling blue eyes, and the frankest and pleasantest smile I had ever beheld. It lit up his whole face like a sunbeam, and disclosed teeth of the utmost regularity and whiteness. I soon found out that he was the hero of St. Ambrose's; a kind of Admirable Crichton: an adept at all sorts of muscular exercises, and invariably surrounded by a troop of friends. Asking my next-door neighbour in Hall one day, a reading man of the name of Boniface, if he knew anything of Daylesford, I got for reply the curt rejoinder that "*He* didn't; and what was more, *I* had better not."

Boniface lived on my staircase, and we had a speaking acquaintance, so I asked for an explanation of the sentiment to which he had just given utterance.

"He's one of those swells who ruin the 'Varsity by coming here to idle and make others idle," rejoined Boniface, glumly.

"He's the pleasantest looking fellow, nevertheless, it has ever been my lot to set eyes on," I said: for I did not like Boniface, and I felt uncommonly attracted to Daylesford.

As my first term drew near its end, I began to get well acquainted with the state of politics at St. Ambrose's, though I seemed no nearer to an acquaintance with Daylesford. I found affairs in a very different state from that which I had expected from my father's account of his college.

In his day, the Warden had been the Honourable and Reverend Fulke Greville, a learned and highly born man, who had died a couple of years before my time, at a patriarchal age, and had been succeeded by a head of a very different stamp—Dr. Lee, a self-made man of low birth, a Radical and an Evangelical; all the traditions of St. Ambrose's were Tory, High Church, and aristocratic. The new Warden complained bitterly, and not without reason, perhaps, of the state in which he found the college discipline: but the endeavours he made to amend it were not crowned with the success they doubtless deserved. When I joined it, St. Ambrose's was fast verging towards a condition of open mutiny; and I gathered from reports that my friend Daylesford was head and front of the offending. Night after night some piece of mischief was cleverly and quietly effected, culminating, one dark November evening, in the severing of the chapel bell rope. The outrage was discovered early the next morning, and the whole college was gated—i.e., confined within its walls—until the perpetrators should confess, or be given up by their accomplices.

The sense of honour kept every man silent, although no one had any doubt as to the chief offender. Gated we remained for a whole fortnight, during which time the most absurd rumours were rife in Oxford. It was said the St. Ambrose's men were all sent down, and that the building was to be turned into a workhouse or a lunatic asylum.

Towards the end of what was our term of imprisonment, there occurred a tremendous fall of snow; it descended heavily and without intermission for forty-eight hours. The second night, just as I was going to bed, a man who lived on my staircase, and who had therefore called on me, came into my room.

"Such a lark, Carrington!" he cried. "We are going to block up the archway between the quads to-night, so that Bogie"—the Warden's pet name—"and all his Dons will find themselves gated with a vengeance in their turn. Come and help us, there's a good fellow. Every man in the college, except Boniface and half a dozen other sneaks, is going to join us."

At nineteen one dreads the epithet of "sneak," and needs but little inducement to aid a frolic. I turned out into the snow. A most whimsical scene presented itself in the inner quad. All noise of footfalls masked by the thickness of the snow, some thirty men, silent as ghosts, were working with a perseverance and alacrity worthy of the noblest cause in piling faggots, stored up for the winter supply of fuel, at each end of the archway which separated the great quad, the residence of the Warden and Fellows, from the little, in which the undergrads were located. The wood well and closely packed, all interstices were filled, and their exterior facings well covered, with a thick coating of frozen snow. That done, as dawn began to break, Daylesford, who was here, there, and every-

where, the ruling spirit of the scene, proposed to make a snow man, in the outward likeness of the Warden. The idea was greeted with a pantomime of delight: in half an hour a monstrous image was erected, of short stature and protuberant build, clothed in black inexpressibles, a rusty long black gown, and a battered old cap, all the very gear of the original—how procured, no persuasion could induce Daylesford to reveal. Our mirth partly exhausted, we were all back in bed before either authorities or officials were stirring, having laid the foundation of precious colds, but with no regret except that the geography of our situation would preclude our seeing the first ebullitions of the fury of the Dons at beholding our handiwork.

It transpired afterwards that the porter, emerging from his lodge to ring the chapel bell—the rope had been mended—was the first to discover the blockade: and report further alleged that the bloated functionary stood and swore aloud for full five minutes by the clock before he could summon self-command to go and apprise the Warden of the news. Rumour was grimly silent as to the manner in which he received the intelligence, but, once afloat, the whole governing body soon heard it, and turned out. At first incredulous, they were forced to receive the evidence of their own eyes.

Labourers were procured from the town, and their work seemed easy: but the faggots proved an unexpected and most formidable impediment. By twelve o'clock, a passage was cleared; and the porter, swelling with rage, made known to the occupants of the little quad—all found hard at work, each man in his own room—that the Warden desired their presence in the Hall at one o'clock.

We presented ourselves accordingly, and were confronted by the whole posse of offended authorities. The Warden, infuriated almost beyond control, informed us in the curtest terms that unless the ringleader or leaders were given up at once, every man in the college should be expelled. If he or they were resigned to justice, the chief culprit or culprits only should be punished with this extreme rigour. Not a word answered him. There were several men present who had refused to join us: two or three who had been utterly ignorant of the projected example. Everyone's suspicions pointed, nevertheless, to Daylesford as chief offender; but the sense of comradeship kept every one silent. The Warden's brow grew even blacker. The Dean whispered to him.

"Go, gentlemen," the Warden thundered, laying a truly vicious stress on the substantive. "The Dean begs that you may be given half an hour for deliberation. At the end of that period bring me your ultimatum, and let me counsel you to be wise in time."

We went, and held a meeting, at which the question, to yield or not to yield, was put to the vote. The Noes had an overwhelming majority. The result conveyed to the Warden, every man in college received notice to be out of Oxford before twelve next day.

The afternoon passed swiftly onwards, and it became gradually more and more evident that a strong sentiment of anger and revolt against the majority pervaded many of the Ayes. No audible expression was at first given to their feelings; but their faces told the tale. And the wrath was not unreasonable: there were men among them to whom expulsion would be ruin. As nightfall approached, murmurs found vent in words. Suddenly the news flew about that the sentence was repealed; Daylesford had given himself up. He had wished and offered to do this from the first; but his popularity was so great that a majority of the men had dissuaded him from the sacrifice. The murmurs of the dissentients, however, were not long in reaching his ears, and without communicating with anyone, he went straight to the Warden.

All other offenders were forgiven, and Daylesford was summarily expelled. And thus vanished all chance of my making his acquaintance.

II.

MARY.

My father was terribly concerned when I told him at Christmas how nearly my Oxford career had escaped a most summary conclusion. To an old University man the sentence of expulsion is the most awful of penalties. It had its terrors for myself; for I was ambitious, though my father was a rich man, the Squire, as well as the Rector, of Fairford Parva.

Matters at St. Ambrose's appeared to have come to a crisis with Daylesford's expulsion, for they progressed peaceably enough the next term. I settled myself to my work with a will: getting through "smalls" early, and through "mods" with success sufficient to encourage me to work still harder for the final prize of a first-class. I had not much to distract my mind from my work, for I made no intimate friends in college, and the only acquaintances I acquired without were people who rather encouraged than interfered with my progress. My father ascertained by accident, when I had been some months at St. Ambrose's, that an old college friend of his, the Reverend Septimus Thane was Rector of St. Ingulphus' at Oxford. He wrote to him; and the Rector called upon me, and asked me to his house.

I found him a kind, gentlemanly old man, a bookworm of that good old High Church school, of which the late excellent Bishop of L—— was one of the brightest luminaries. In my visits I saw more of his daughter than of himself. At this date Charlotte Thane was a woman of two or three-and-thirty years of age, looking it, and not ashamed of it: a model helpmeet for a parish priest, and the best of daughters; an excellent housewife, and a quick, clever, well cultivated woman. In person she was tall, full, and well-made, with the most perfect arms and hands I ever saw; pale-faced, dark-haired, with a bright, serene expression. She would have made the most admirable of wives: as

it was, she was the most admirable of friends that a raw boy could well hope to have; for she had the sense, the self-possession, the experience of a woman of the world, and all that warm-hearted quiet kindness of manner which wins the confidence of the young and shy. I used to tell her she reminded me of Macaulay's exquisite description of Madame de Maintenon; her character was like "that tender green upon which the eye loves to repose."

Many of my leisure evening hours were spent in Miss Thane's company; hours utterly undisturbed by any dreams of romance or passion, for she was too matter-of-fact, too straightforward, to have the slightest grain of coquetry in her disposition. The Rectory was one of the pleasantest haunts imaginable. One of those old-fashioned town houses standing in a street, but opening at the back with so charming a surprise into a green old-fashioned garden: having wainscoted rooms within, and trees old as the city walls without; a dwelling perfect both in summer and winter to my mind.

A day or two after the beginning of my second May Term, I went to pay Miss Thane my first call in that term. I opened the hall door according to my wont, and looked into the drawing and dining rooms on either side of the hall. Finding both empty, I walked out into the garden. There, sitting on a rustic seat under the shade of an umbrageous elm, I saw two figures where I had been wont to see but one. The second was that of a girl some fourteen years Miss Thane's junior; a girl with rippling fair hair, and sea-blue eyes, a broad, low white forehead, and features piquante and most expressive, if not perfectly regular. She was slight, but her figure, of middle height, was perfectly well moulded, and she had the smallest hands in the world, which were engaged in tying up a bouquet of early roses, from whose lustre a tinge of colouring seemed to have been imparted to her cheek.

"My friend, Harry Carrington, Mary; Miss Neville," said Charlotte, introducing us as I came slowly forward, hampered by a hesitation and a bashfulness which had never before troubled me in the peaceful precincts surrounding Miss Thane. Miss Neville held out her hand; Charlotte with her tranquil smile made room for me between them on the seat.

"I did not know you expected a visitor, Miss Thane," was my first sapient remark.

"Nor did I when I saw you last, six weeks ago. But since you went down, I have been spending a week from home, marvellous to relate, and I found out that some distant connections of Papa's lived in the next parish to the one in which I was staying. The renewal of the acquaintance has led to Mary's visit."

"I have been so long anxious to see Oxford," said Miss Neville, "and Miss Thane says the May Term is the best. It is so kind of her to invite me."

"Do you find it all that you expected?" I asked.

"I am sure I shall : but I have only driven from the station here, and you know what a drive that is. I came last night."

I looked eagerly at Miss Thane. She anticipated the expression of my thoughts.

"You will show us everything, will you not?" she said. "It is so many years since I have lionized Oxford, that I daresay I shall find much that is new to myself. I should be a most imperfect guide."

"Let us begin to-morrow, and with St. Ambrose's," I cried.

"Are you at St. Ambrose's? And have you been there long?" asked Miss Neville, fixing her blue eyes upon me, the colour deepening in her cheeks.

"I am. I have been there more than a year and a half," I answered.

The next day we began our tour of inspection with St. Ambrose's, in which Miss Neville took an interest which delighted me. It is a jolly old place, dear to the heart of every one of its sons. There are colleges in Oxford far more grand in outline, and far more perfect in detail, yet she said she liked nothing else half so well, after I had shown her everything. At no time could Oxford, its river, its buildings, its trees, look more lovely than in the soft glow and tender glory of May time, and a May such as we had that year.

When we had seen everything that we could see,—and I made the most of the sights—we finished our round where we had begun it. I gave a luncheon in my rooms at St. Ambrose's; the *parti-carré*—the two Thaness, Miss Neville, and myself—was perfect in my mind as to numbers.

After luncheon the discussion fell upon the approaching gaieties which always end the May Term, and I told them that I should expect their presence at the theatricals which were to take place during Commemoration, at St. Ambrose's.

"Oh! how delightful!" cried Mary, at whom I looked, though I spoke to Miss Thane.

"I wish we could come," said Charlotte, earnestly, speaking low. "But, Mary, dear, we should want a chaperon, and I know no one who is likely to go. We have always lived so very quietly, you know."

Mary's face fell deplorably. "Wouldn't your papa take us?" she whispered. Mr. Thane, buried in a book as usual, heard nothing of what passed.

"I should be afraid to ask him," his daughter said. "Glare and noise always make him ill, and it would be late for him."

She relapsed into silence, and thought a few minutes, her brow knit. Then her kind face brightened.

"Do you think your mother would come and stay with us for Commem., Mary? She could chaperon you then to everything. Harry and I would get you tickets."

"You would go too," interrupted Mary.

"If I were wanted, but not else. My days of gaiety are over,"

said Miss Thane, smiling her moonlight smile. "Write to your mother this evening, Mary."

She wrote; and an acceptance came, followed in due time by a stately, middle-aged grey-haired dame, of portly and most majestic bearing; par excellence a British matron of the upper ten thousand. She was gracious to a degree to me: but I did not for one instant suppose she would have noticed me, had not my father's name been enrolled among Burke's Landed Gentry, as well as in the Clergy List. However, I was not critical, for Mrs. Neville's good-will was the thing I desired most to gain, after the affections of her daughter.

And of Mary's love I began to have hopes. She was sometimes pensive now, and at first she had been invariably gay: her colour would come and go with tremulous suddenness. Her eyes would sometimes fall before a glance: and they had been wont to look straight into yours with a piercing blue lustre.

The campaign of Commemoration began on a Friday, with a concert at Exeter: on Saturday the Amateur Concert took place, in the Town-hall. Show Sunday was devoted to Magdalen and New College Chapels, and to the evening promenade in the Broad Walk. On Monday there was a flower-show in Trinity Gardens in the morning: a Grand Operatic Concert in the Theatre in the afternoon; and the procession of boats and a ball at Christ Church in the evening. On Tuesday the Freemasons' Fête was given in the gardens of St. John's, and in the evening there were the St. Ambrose' Theatricals. The next day we went to the Theatre in the morning: and were to go to the Freemasons' ball in the evening at the Town-hall:—it was some years ago, and the Corn Exchange was not then finished.

We had been to everything. Mrs. Neville had chaperoned Mary to all the evening amusements, and to as many of the daylight festivities as her strength could compass. Miss Thane had given her the sanction of her presence at the chapel services, and at the less interesting of the out-door fêtes. I had accompanied or joined them everywhere: and, despite a most robust constitution and the sustaining power of love, I was almost done up. But Mary seemed endowed with superhuman vigour: her spirits were unflagging, her energies untiring. Not until the afternoon of the Wednesday, the last day of Commem., one of pouring rain, and without any daylight engagement after early morning to occupy us, could she be got to confess that she was in the least tired. Then she allowed to Charlotte that she was certain she should be able to dance nothing that night but round dances, for she could not put her foot flat to the ground.

Miss Thane betrayed her to Mrs. Neville, who bore down upon Mary and myself, seated in the drawing-room. "To ensure that her daughter should take some rest," she said, she turned me out, with orders not to show myself again at the Rectory, till seven, the hour fixed for the very high tea which was to reinforce us for the exertions of the coming ball.

III.

DELILAH?

I WENT to my rooms, and tried to rest, but I could not. My mind was in a whirl. Mary had told me that morning, that they were to go home on the Friday after a day of repose, and I had determined that I would tell her what was in my heart before I let her go. Should I tell her that night? or would the tranquillity of the peaceful rectory garden be a better theatre for a love scene, than the crowded ball room?

I could not make up my mind. I would trust to chance, I resolved, springing off the sofa on which I had been tossing for two hours and more. I went to the window. It had left off raining heavily, and a cool mist was falling. I looked at my watch; it was six. An hour's walk and a pipe would refresh me more than enforced quiescence in a small, hot, low room, and I turned out straightway.

Drizzling as it was, the High Street was full of sightseers, and in my present mood, the only endurable alternative to Mary's society was solitude. The rustle, chat, and laughter of strangers was intolerable. I bethought me, consequently, of the quiet walk through Mesopotamia, then newly made: it would afford me a circuit of about two miles from St. Ambrose's to the Rectory, and, taken leisurely, would bring me to St. Ingulphus' in time for tea. I sauntered along, my hands thrust deep into my pockets, my head down, a pipe between my teeth. I got through the distance without meeting a living soul. Suddenly I felt that the sense of solitude was broken. I looked up; and beheld, not five yards from me, Mary Neville hanging affectionately on the arm of Daylesford. I had not seen him for a year and a half, but I could no more mistake him than her. The lapse of time had but made him handsomer, more distinguished looking: a long and silky black moustache now gave a manlier touch to his dark and aristocratic countenance.

Mary was talking earnestly; her face was upraised eagerly to his: an expression of tender and appealing affection softening, to the gentlest entreaty, the piquante grace of her delicate features. He was looking down on her, half persuaded, it was plain, for love of her, but yet most unwilling to yield. Neither of them perceived me till I was passing them: then Mary turned her head suddenly, and met my indignant gaze. I raised my hat; she had the effrontery to bow with a would-be saucy air, but she had the decency to blush, and that violently. Daylesford gave me a careless glance, attracted by my movement: but there was neither recognition nor interest in his eyes.

This, then, was the cause of her attachment to St. Ambrose's: this, the reason she had lingered over every detail, and had penetrated

every corner free to visitors. "She had long wanted to see Oxford." No doubt she had! I had left her to rest, and here she was, a mile from home, braving the weather, and disregarding her extreme fatigue, for the purpose of an interview with Daylesford: an interview evidently clandestine, for I had never heard her mention his name.

I ground my teeth in savage fury at her perfidy: in unavailing bitterness to think how vainly I could ever have hoped to cope with Daylesford. His was just the style and person that would infallibly attract a girl's fancy: the ideal of the aristocrat, tall, slight, with the grace of an Apollo, and the outline and bearing of a king. I, long-descended, even as himself, had all the outward man of a stalwart yeoman, or at best, a country squire, middle-sized, strongly built, whiskerless, with blue eyes, light curly hair, and a colour like a girl's, with big hands, good for nothing but rowing or cricket, and big feet, apt to walk forty miles on end, or jump the breadth of twenty feet, but clumsy in a lady's drawing-room.

What should I do, I thought suddenly, looking round after the pair, who were now far away in the distance. Should I throw her over at once, and with contumely, heaping open contempt upon her for her perfidy? Yes; and cut her to the heart.

"Nay," reasoned common sense, all powerful sovereign, "how could I do that if Daylesford had her heart safe in his keeping? I should but betray my own sore and jealous rage. There was another course by which I might hope to hurt her: I could wound her vanity. Vain she must be, for she had encouraged me; and to what end?" The second thought was the best, I decided. I would present myself at the Rectory. I would be as easy and as debonnaire as possible. I would join them afterwards at the ball, and dance with her as I had intended doing: and I would call the next day to take leave of them with the most telling sang-froid. "Diamond cut diamond": she should think she had met her match for once. Me easy and debonnaire, good lack! Me endued with sang-froid, or the hardness of the diamond!

No sooner resolved, than put in the way to execution. I bent my steps towards the Rectory. When I arrived, I found there Miss Thane making tea at the round table in the centre of the large old-fashioned drawing-room, and Miss Neville, looking heated and worried, but seated where I had left her three hours before; in the bow window, looking into the garden, the same book open on her lap. As I entered, Mrs. Neville came down the wide staircase; the good lady was flushed by a siesta; her cap and her hair were a good deal tumbled and awry.

"Well, my sweet child, and are you rested?" she enquired, pausing at the door. "Have you been asleep, my darling? I have not closed an eye. I hope you have fared better?"

Mary looked up at her ponderously caressing parent, a hot flush

rising, despite herself, to her very hair, as she murmured something which Mrs. Neville accepted as an affirmative.

"That's well, my own. Let me go and call your dear papa, Charlotte!"

Charlotte thanked her; and the dowager departed towards the study. Her back turned, I spoke, on the impulse of the moment, utterly infuriated by Mary's double dealing.

"I hope you enjoyed your walk this afternoon, Miss Neville," I said, speaking in low, hurried, bitterly savage tones, which I flattered myself were the accents of cold composure. "Not a *very* good preparation for dancing to-night, I should have imagined."

She looked uncertain whether to burst out crying or laughing. She tossed her head haughtily, but dew-drops glistened in her eyes.

"What, you are jealous, my friend; 'in all the moods and tenses of that amiable passion' are you?" she quoted mockingly.

The blood rushed to my face. Her manner was irreconcilable with innocence.

"Tell me what Mr. Daylesford is to you; I have a right to the knowledge," I said, half imperious, half entreating.

"My nearest and dearest," she said, darting a defiant glance at me.

"Thank you for the frankness of the avowal. It would have been better made earlier," I said, striving to conceal my emotion, but breaking utterly down. "Miss Thane, you will perhaps excuse me this evening?" I said abruptly, turning to Charlotte.

She had not heard more than a word or two of our conversation, for her back had been towards us, and the room was large. Now she turned and looked at us both, with anxiety and wonder on her kind countenance.

"Mary, what is it?" she asked. "Harry, stay!"

I was already at the door, but Mary had anticipated her call. Rushing forward, she had seized me by the arm. The clasp of her little firm hands darted painful transport through my veins.

"Don't be a goose, you silly boy," she cried, with the manner of an adult admonishing a very little and very froward child. "I will tell you nothing except at my own time and my own pleasure, and that may be to-night at the ball."

"I am not going," I interrupted sullenly.

"Not if I ask you to dance the first waltz with me?" she said, still holding my arm, and looking up in my face, her colour raised, her eyes speaking soft and eager entreaty.

Just so she had looked up in Daylesford's face, but the similitude did not strike me. I yielded like a lamb, as Mr. Thane and Mrs. Neville came in to tea.

IV.

ELUCIDATION.

I had seen Mary in many moods before that evening, for hers was a most versatile nature : but never had I seen her half so gracious, half so bewitching. It had been her wont to make me pay for any momentary touch of tenderness by flouting and tormenting me. Now she was altogether soft and gentle, and the experience had the charm of a double fascination. I could not tear myself away till Mrs. Neville told Mary for the third time it was necessary she should instantly go and dress. Then I sprang up, making a violent effort.

"You will not be in time for the first waltz," I told her.

"I shall," she said. "Mind that *you* are."

I went ; thinking that no power on earth could have detained me from the ball-room a moment beyond the hour fixed on the tickets as that of admission. I was bewitched enough to have hopes that the mystery of Mary's conduct might be explicable. But the fates were against me. I found Boniface in my rooms, when I got back to St. Ambrose's. He still lived on my staircase, and we had kept up a degree of acquaintance founded on a similitude of interests and ambitions, as regarded our University careers. He had been working awfully hard, and had no stamina to support such exertions. He looked fearfully done up. Just as I was telling him it was a precious good job for him Long Vac. had begun, he justified the sentiment by falling off his chair on to the rug, in a dead faint.

I snatched the sofa pillows and bolstered up his head : then I dashed into my room for a great can of water I kept filled to supply my bath, and deluged him with its contents, roaring out lustily, meanwhile, for assistance. It came at last, in the person of a scout, apparently very much out of breath with haste, and considerably flushed as to the face.

"He's uncommon wet," was the worthy's first sapient remark, as he surveyed the prostrate form.

"He is," I said, rather ruefully. You might have ladled the water off him ; it was making a little lake on the floor.

"He'll get cold," I said. "Let's carry him to his room, and then you go for a doctor, while I put him into bed."

No sooner said than done. The doctor came in due or rather undue time ; he pronounced the patient in want of rest, and opined that bed was the best place for him. It was half-past ten before the doctor went. I was getting desperate ; so I promised the scout a sovereign to stay with the invalid till three the next morning, and flinging on my dress clothes, rushed to the Town-hall.

Lancers were being danced all over the room, which was thronged. I looked round eagerly, but saw no Mary. Mrs. Neville, I descried,

seated amid the chaperons on a bench close by the door, at the bottom of the room. As I was moving to ask her where her daughter was, a knot of people to the right separated, and I saw her whom I sought leaning on Daylesford's arm. She was speaking: they were so close I could hear what they said.

"Eleven! and your friend not here! It was a shabby trick to do you out of your dance, Mary."

"Oh! never mind, he'll come! And he will ask me for another, never fear," she said, laughing gaily. "And I have had that one with you. You know mamma will never let me dance with you, Hugh, she says it looks as if I could not get other partners, and you always did suit me better than anyone else in the world."

"What, better than Mr. Carrington?" asked Daylesford, bending down and looking maliciously in her face; yet speaking a little jealously.

"Better than anyone, I have said," she answered flushing scarlet.

In truth, even my jealous heart confessed that they did look well matched. Youthful, handsome, happy: he by far the most distinguished looking man in the large and crowded room; she, lustrous in pink, the colour of all others for fair and radiant blondes. As the thought passed through my mind, she turned round suddenly, moved perhaps by some presentiment of my presence. I advanced instantly towards them; rage in my heart, a forced smile upon my face.

"I should have to apologise," I said, bowing stiffly, "but that I have no doubt my absence has provided Miss Neville with a far better and more suitable partner than myself."

"What, you have been listening!" said Mary with a malicious laugh, and a provoking curtsey. "If you had come a little earlier, you would have heard something that would have interested you still more deeply."

"I regret to have lost it," I said, stiff to pokerishness.

"Mary! Mary! you are too bad," said Daylesford, dropping her arm and retreating. "You know where to find me when you have settled your difference with Mr. Carrington."

"Dear me! Hugh is out of sight already!" she said, looking round with feigned annoyance. "How very tiresome! Never mind, I shall have plenty of opportunities to introduce him to you."

"I have no desire to know the gentleman," I said.

"What, not want to know my brother?" said Mary. "How very uncomplimentary to me! I thought you liked me better than that, Mr. Carrington."

"Your brother?" I gasped.

"My half-brother: better to me than troops of whole-brothers are to most girls. I could not tell you about him before, for mamma did not know he was here, and if my little plot had failed, she might have been set against you, if she had found out that you were a conspirator

and she is not easily appeased. But I forgot—you do not understand it all. Of course not! Let us go and sit down on one of those sofas in the passages outside, and I will tell you about it."

A waltz was beginning, we found a lonely situation, and she commenced her story.

"Mamma's first husband was a Mr. Daylesford. Hugh was their only child; he is rich. Four years after Mr. Daylesford died, mamma married my father—Mr. Neville. Hugh was five years old then; he lived with us till his majority: but there were often rows. Papa and mamma were middle-aged people when I was born, and they were strict, and not used to children. Papa, too, is excessively religious. Hugh was always *my* delight: my playmate, my guardian, my defender, my comforter. I loved him more than I ever loved anybody ——"

"But not more than you love someone?" I whispered, putting my arm round her waist.

"Let me finish my story, sir," she said, disengaging herself, with scarlet cheeks. "Well, we grew up, and Hugh came to college, rather late. He had hoped to get into the army, but mamma set her face so determinedly against it, and papa thinks fighting wicked. It would make her wretched, mamma said; and Hugh is too kind to be happy while anyone he loves is unhappy. He had almost finished his course here, when there were all those rows in St. Ambrose's, and he was expelled. He had always been fast; not really wicked, but wild; and that seemed the height of viciousness to papa. His expulsion made him furious, and mamma excessively angry. They refused to see him, and even returned a letter unopened that he wrote to mamma. He is haughty, and tried no more, but I did not give up hopes, and watched for an opportunity of reconciling them. Mamma is the governing spirit at home, Mr. Carrington: I knew if she could ever be brought to forgive Hugh, papa would follow her lead at last, after much grumbling. If she were to see him, unprepared, I thought her heart might melt. So I wrote to him directly she came here, telling him that I was in Oxford, but not saying that she was. I met him by appointment this afternoon, when she was safe asleep; and made him promise to be here waiting for us this evening. He met us at the entrance to the room, and mamma gave in with ignominious quickness at the sight of him. They have had a talk, and she has promised to use her influence with papa, if Hugh will take his degree as a sign of penitence. He is going to Magdalen Hall next term."

"I wonder why you concealed so carefully from me that you had had a brother at St. Ambrose's?" I said, as she paused.

"Because Charlotte Thane told me before I saw you how good and proper you were, sir," she replied; "and I thought that you would be set against Hugh if you knew he had been expelled. I wanted you so much to meet him without prejudice, and like him."

Then I told her, to her intense delight, how powerfully Daylesford

had taken my fancy when I had first seen him ; and that I had helped in the very raid which had terminated in his expulsion.

"I am glad !" she said. "I shall not be frightened of you now I know you are like other people."

"Were you ever afraid of me ?" I asked, astonished.

"Dreadfully," she confessed ; but her eyes half contradicted her words.

"You will never be afraid of me again," I whispered.

"No," she promised. And then I began to take myself most bitterly to task for my brutal suspicions. "If Charlotte Thane had only happened ever to tell me that she had known Daylesford, I should have been less idiotic ! But, you see, it seemed to me that his existence had been purposely hid from me —"

"Charlotte had never heard there was such a person till six weeks ago," interrupted Mary. "It is papa who is a connection of the Thanes, and you know they had lost sight of each other for years and years. I could hardly help giving you a hint of the nature of the mystery this afternoon, but you made me too angry. You ought to have felt you could trust me —"

"I should have if I had loved you less," was my logical defence. "I cannot imagine such a love as mine free from jealousy. Your cool, indifferent suitors may be judicious and impartial, but I am of a different stamp, my sweetest."

"I hope you are going to be a barrister ?" queried Mary tormentingly. "You have skill enough to make the worse appear the better cause, most certainly."

I was about to take my revenge, when the portly form of my mother-in-law elect loomed, large and imposing, in a doorway close at hand.

"My dearest child," she began. "Do you know you have sat out two whole dances ? And your deserted partners have been teasing me out of my very life."

We rose, murmuring apologetically, and considerably roseate as to our cheeks.

"You must give me all the round dances while I am here," I whispered. "I have to be back by three. And that reminds me I have never told you why I was late to-night —"

"You need not," she interrupted with a saucy smile. "I know well enough you would have been here in time if you could have managed it."

I took a first-class in due course, and married Mary directly afterwards. I got not only the wife I coveted but the friend I desired, and a brother to boot. Daylesford and myself became inseparables. One of the first questions I asked him was, where he got the Warden's toggery from to decorate our man of snow. "I tipped that old humbug of a porter considerably," was the simple explanation of the mystery.

ANTOINE, THE BLACKSMITH.

By F. E. M. NOTLEY, AUTHOR OF "OLIVE VARCOE."

WE have grand names in the Ardennes; old Roman names, modified into patois, toned down, as it were, to a sober tint, suited to the grimy trades to which Cæsar, Augustus, Antony, and Galba have betaken themselves.

Antoine, the blacksmith, was a sturdy fellow, and in spite of a stoop in the shoulders, he was handsome too, and well-made. Yet there was a shiftiness in his eye that made that stoop, at times, look wicked. He had a hazel eye—light hazel, the fickle colour—the most fickle eye that shines; the eye ever changing, ever seeking something new, every wearying of what it hath, ever greedy of enjoyment in the present, ever ungrateful for the past, unmindful of the future. Ah! and when such an eye hath soft brown lashes round it, 'tis the most dangerous eye to a woman's peace that ever lighted up the head of fickle man.

Poor Eulalie! She was the prettiest girl in all the commune, but not hardy and brown like the Ardennaises. No touch of coarseness in her; too frail and delicate for the rough climate and the rough people, she looked like some pale exotic plant brought harshly from a greenhouse to die in the cold wind.

I was very sorry when I saw her dancing with Antoine at the village fête; sorrier still when I met her next day coming home from vespers, walking shily by his side.

"Now, hang the man!" I said, within myself. "Are there not hardy maidens enough in the village—maidens who would bear his fickleness as calmly as they will next winter's frost; why, then, should he fix on this frail flower? If he breathes over it one frosty breath, it will die."

"Good evening, Eulalie," I said, aloud. "It is rather late for you to be out: the wind is fresh, the dew is falling fast. You should go in, my child. You know the Doctor said you should avoid night air."

"I have my shawl, sir, thank you," she said, sweetly.

"I can take care of Ma'amselle Eulalie," said Antoine, with a curious fire in his light eyes. "Monsieur's solicitude is ill-placed. Bon soir, monsieur. We go to take a turn by the river."

I looked after them and sighed. Then I turned resolutely away.

"A plague take my dreaming fancies!" thought I. "Why must I always be meddling? And a thousand of my poor warnings would be of no avail. Will a pebble on the sea-shore stop the tide?"

I had a house near that pretty hamlet—a sort of summer nest—

whither I resorted in the fishing months, when the river near was brimful of trout and grayling, and teeming with other fish less dainty. And so it happened every day, as I shouldered my basket and rod, and went forth solitary to my sport, I saw Antoine, the blacksmith, busier at his wooing than at his work. In the morning I met him coming to his forge, and I knew he had had speech with Eulalie in her little garden, for the saucy man bore a flower in his hand, or pinned daintily in his wide-awake, and his light hazel eyes smiled mockingly as he bade me good-morrow. Then, in the evening, when I came home weary, well-laden with fish, I saw his forge fire dead, and his tools flung down with a hasty hand.

"He is away in the summer woods with Eulalie," I said, and my basket and rod grew strangely heavy.

When I met Eulalie she was all smiles and brightness—a rosier hue on her delicate face, a softer light in her loving blue eyes, and in her elastic step a newer grace. Looking at her happiness, I grew to have softer thoughts of Antoine.

"I have mistaken his character," I said; "or else this poor girl's singular beauty is able to chain even a fickle fancy."

Then I schooled and chided myself right well for my own sore thoughts.

"Come now, silly one," I said, "own to thyself that this rare beauty of hers—so delicate, so patrician—stirred within thy solitary fancy some strange dreamings. 'Not a girl made for a peasant to love,' ran thy musings, 'but intended by nature for a lady. Nay, more, a princess of the woods; too delicate, too refined, to give her heart to one of these clowns. If, now, a man—a gentleman—knowing his own mind, could have the courage to fling aside worldly trammels——'"

Ah me! how the threads of a thin purpose snap even at a slight touch.

Antoine, the blacksmith, danced next night with Eulalie at the village fête, walked home with her from vespers, and, in the morning, I went fishing!

"All things are for the best," I said. "She is a peasant girl—the princess was in my fancy—and she loves a peasant. How much better and happier for her than the sneers of Brussels, or the cold contempt of an English provincial town."

So I hooked trout and grayling in glens and valleys, where a painter's soul would faint with ecstasy, and Antoine, the blacksmith, went into Love's garden, and picked my fairest rose.

What mattered it? Philosophy and the world's customs deemed us both right. Therefore, it was better for me to fish and take my pastime, and leave Antoine, the blacksmith, to his work, and his wooing. This last was sport to him—crueller sport than mine; for, like a wicked fowler, he snared my little bird and slew it.

When I went back to Brussels in the autumn, I left the pair be-

trothed. I was in haste to go; I resisted the great Baron's entreaty to stay a week with him, to hunt the wild boar, and shoot foxes and wild cats in the forest; and I rejected the more noble offer of an adventurous Cantab, who had brought a paper boat upon his shoulders, and proposed to row me and himself down the rivers Lesse and Meuse, and on to the world's end if I would.

In hard work at Brussels, the winter went by coldly, the spring more coldly still; then came fiery summer, and I thought gladly of rushing back to my nest in the Ardennes.

"They were to be married at the new year," I said. "She is quite a matron now. Ah, well! I hope Antoine, the blacksmith, will make her a good husband—good and true, for he has the fairest flower of the Ardennes."

I asked no questions of my housekeeper on the night of my arrival in my summer home, and in the morning the good dame was busy, so I strolled down to the village and called at the good Curé's.

"Yes, he is at home," said the priest's sister; "but he is engaged."

"Then I will wait awhile," I answered, and I stepped into the little parlour.

When the door was closed, and I was left alone, the hum of voices reached me, and looking into the garden, I saw the Curé seated on a rustic bench near the window. A muffled figure stood by him; but she leant against the wall, and I could not see her face.

"No, my father; let him who caused my pain partake of it. It seems that I must die. Well, let him see me die. Let him know what he has done."

The book I had taken up fell from my hand. This was Eulalie's voice, changed and broken, but not less sweet and musical.

"My child," said the priest, "you are wrong; these feelings are sinful; they savour of revenge."

"No, father; not revenge. Heaven has avenged me. The girl for whom he left me is dead—cut down in the midst of her triumph and joy—dead, after only one day's illness. How, then, can I have thoughts of vengeance in my heart? And although I too, die, the good God has been merciful to me. I die slowly, inch by inch, and not in joy, as she did. No; joy and I parted long ago."

"But, my daughter, surely for one so near the end, thy thoughts are too much engrossed by this world. Come to me in confessional, and hear of heavenly things; and put the thoughts of this marriage behind thee, as a temptation of the enemy."

"O father, you mistake me!" cried Eulalie, and there was a slight ring of indignation in her voice. "I do no wicked thing in marrying Antoine. I love him. He is come back to me in sorrow and remorse, and no one will believe that I have forgiven him, if I do not

become his wife. If he is my husband, he can nurse and tend me; he can come to my bedside, and receive my last prayer, my last word; but if I refuse him, I must die away from his presence, and my mother will hate him."

"Say no more, poor child; I will marry thee, if thou wilt."

"Thanks, father. All the formalities the law demands are done; we will come to church to-morrow."

She went down the garden with a feeble step, and as she turned to shut the wicket gate, I saw her face.

Was this the Flower of St. Etienne? Poor flower! how changed and sad, how pale and broken, since I saw her, but a year ago, radiant in the joy of her first love.

"What has happened?" I asked the Curé, as he shook me by the hand. "Eulalie is sadly altered. She has a dying look upon her face that grieves me."

"Her face tells but the sorrowful truth, my friend. She goes with the first breath of autumn; she is in a deep decline."

"And how is this, that she is not married to the blacksmith? I overheard your talk; you marry her to-morrow."

"Yes; and I am sorry for it. The man looks upon this marriage as an expiation of his sin, and I would not grant him this poor salve to his conscience could I help it."

"But they were to have been married at the new year," I cried. "I cannot understand this delay."

"At the new year, Antoine was talking of marriage to another maiden. Sit down, and I will tell you the tale."

"All went well with Antoine and Eulalie till the Feast of St. Barbe, last November. At the little village of St. Barbe, across the hill, there was a dance on their fête day. Antoine went to it. Eulalie did not go. The weather was rough, and he persuaded her to remain at home. Of late, I think, he had wearied a little of her love, and her calm temper, which never tried him with caprice and coquetry."

"There was a procession and much extra service at the church of St. Barbe on the fête day, and I went thither to assist the Curé. So it happened that I passed down among the dancers in the afternoon, and observed Antoine dancing vigorously with a handsome girl named Thérèse Dufresne."

"I have ever thought him a fickle man," I said, interrupting the Curé's story with a useless sigh.

"Fickle and heartless. The dance was but the beginning of his coquetry with Thérèse. A few Sundays more he still appeared by Eulalie's side in coming home from mass; a few evenings more he waited for her, as she came from vespers; then he went over shamefully to his idol, and all the village knew she was deserted. She had no pride to bear her up. She sank from that day, making no effort to hide her grief."

"But, engrossed in his new passion, Antoine saw nothing. He

was at St. Barbe every day. He spent all his Sundays and holidays there. From her window Eulalie often watched him, as he walked whistling and careless over the hill, swinging in his hand the flowers he was taking to Thérèse.

"Thérèse was a handsome girl. A thorough Ardennaise, with dark hair and eyes, and ruddy brown complexion, tall and strong, with an arm almost as well able to wield a hammer as Antoine's own. Moreover, she was wilful in her temper and capricious, and this suited a man like him.

"As he went to St. Barbe, he never knew whether his greeting would be kind or cruel. If she had parted with him with a kiss on one day, she might meet him with a frown and a hard word the next. And so, in spite of their many quarrels, she kept the fickle man faithful, far more enthralled by her coarse beauty and hard caprices, than ever he had been by the perfect love and loveliness of Eulalie.

"At length he told in triumph that he had won her consent to wed him; and he wore at his forge a more joyous face, whistling and singing as he handled his work, and sent forth the sparks from his fire merrily into the little street.

"Eulalie would not believe the news. She could not, would not, deem him so cruel and heartless. Up to this time she had, perhaps, nursed some foolish hopes; some thought that he would leave his fickle fancy and come back to her. And when her mother told her the tale of his approaching marriage, she shook her head, and said she would only believe it from his own lips.

"She went down to the forge, where the hammer sounded merrily on the anvil, and the sparks flew, and the laughter and jest of rude health helped the work, and added to its noisy music. There, unnoticed, she leaned a moment against the door-sill, watching the brawny arms and handsome face of her false lover, as, in the pride of his strength, he wielded and moulded the glowing iron on his anvil. He, careless in the enjoyment of his coarse health, and happy in his fickle love, and she pale, broken-hearted, and dying—dying for him. There she stood at his door, unregarded—she who had wasted health, and life, and love on him—while he trolled a rollicking ditty with amorous lips, and the glow of the fire warm on his ruddy cheek. But suddenly he turned his light hazel eyes on her—the sheen of the flames in them—and a touch of shame came over him.

"'Ma'amselle Eulalie,' he said, 'can I do anything for you?'

"'I am come,' gasped the girl, 'not in anger, Antoine, but only to hear the truth from your own lips. Is it true that you marry Thérèse Dufresne next week?'

"Her face turned ashy pale as she spoke, and she grasped the door-sill with feeble hands to support herself.

"Antoine was embarrassed and silent.

"'You see, Mademoiselle Eulalie,' he said, shrugging his shoulders,

and holding out his blackened hands in a deprecating way, 'you were scarcely the girl to suit a man like me. You are so frail and delicate—almost like a lady.'

" 'Antoine, I was well and happy till I knew you.'

"And, wringing her hands together, the dying girl looked in his face for pity. But there was none. There was only a rough kind of shame in the man, and a feeling of irritation that she should dare to come there, and reproach him with her pale face.

" 'You had better go home, Mademoiselle ; the villagers will wag their tongues at you if they see you speaking to me *now*.'

" 'The truth ! the truth ! Tell me the truth, Antoine ; that is all I ask.'

" 'Well, then, since you will have it—yes ; I marry Mademoiselle Thérèse next week.'

"And, as he spoke his bride's name, there shone in his pale eyes that amorous light and gleam of triumphant passion, that in days gone by had fallen upon *her* face in warm rays, when he stooped to kiss her, or when beneath the summer shade of trees, they had walked hand in hand, talking of their love.

"Down upon the anvil came the stalwart blow of his great hammer, and, adding discourtesy to his cruel words, he turned his back on her, whistling at his work. It needed but this to break her heart. She left the door faint and sick with woe, uttering no word of anger, breathing no rash prayer to heaven to avenge her cause.

"And yet the vengeance came. The month of May broke in upon us fiercely hot. Snow melted hurriedly on the hills, flooding valley and meadow as with a sea, and as this dried in the sun, leaving many a sluggish pool, fever fell upon the villages that lay nestled in the deep glens.

"You know, St. Barbe lies low between great cliffs. Well, the fever fell there first, and in three days ten men and women, hale and hearty, dropped before it, as the corn falls before the sickle.

"In the evening Thérèse Dufresne walked with her lover, counting the hours to their wedding ; in the morning she lay on her bed stricken, raving, dying. Her father sent for Antoine, but she did not know him. With frenzied hands, she pushed him from her, and died raving of some old lover gone for a soldier, and lying blind in the hospital at Ghent.

"And now the blacksmith was a marked man. People cried 'A judgment !' and his forge grew silent and deserted. Meanwhile, Eulalie perished day by day, like a flower withering in the wind. And whether it was remorse, or time-serving fear, or a return of love, I know not, but in a few short weeks after Thérèse's death, Antoine wooed her again to be his wife, and she consented."

Thus the Curé's tale ended : and I, looking sorrowfully in his face, sat silent, then walked homewards musing on many things.

They were married, but I went not to the wedding ; and for many days I shouldered my basket early, and wandered to the deepest and farthest glens, sometimes throwing my line idly in the stream, but oftener sitting on the bank watching the ripples flow and the rushes wave.

So a month went by ; and every evening when I returned and laid down my empty basket, with the smile that hid a sigh, I heard that she was worse.

"She is dying fast, now," said my housekeeper. "Poor thing ! she is worn to a very shadow. I saw her yesterday in the cemetery leaning on her husband's arm, choosing her grave. There were tears on his cheek. Ah ! he has *his* share now of grief, as it is fitting he should have. And I hear they are very poor. People go miles away to another forge, rather than go to him."

"Poor !" I said. And there rose up in my throat so strange a sob, that for a moment no other word would come. Then, hiding my face in shadow, I bade her take hastily all needful things to her.

"No, stay—not to her. Take them to her mother, and let her take them to her daughter."

Then, sitting lonely by my wood fire, I thought bitterly of the empty shadows of this world, and how strange it was that I should send bread in charity to one whom, in foolish dreams, I had clothed in satin and jewels, and honoured as a queen.

A few days further on, when I heard she would leave her bed no more, there came upon me a silly longing to see her face. After many thoughts and fightings with my wish, I spoke to her mother of this.

"I had ever been her friend," I said. "Might I see her and say farewell ?"

The mother looked at me with frightened eyes. "She could not tell," she answered. "Antoine had grown so fierce, she dared not ask him. Somehow, since he knew he must lose his wife, and she slipped from his grasp into Death's, he loved her with a stronger, fiercer love than ever in his passionate days he had given to Thérèse ; and he begrudged every word and look given to another. He was jealous even of her."

And the woman went her way, weeping as she went.

Now I was bitter indeed. So this coarse man, who had killed my pretty flower, was her master in death as in life ; and he denied me even the poor consolation of one last word. What a strange triumph was his over the loving heart he had broken !

The next day, with my rod as a pretence, I climbed a great hill-top, and sat among the solitudes of the mountain, till faith in God's goodness, growing from the peace and stillness and beauty of the earth, wrung that drop of bitterness from out my heart.

Wending my way homewards among the evening shadows, I met the Curé.

"Come with me," he said. "Eulalie has asked for you."

And now I hesitated. "I fear," I said, "to go. Perhaps my indignation for that man will not hold itself calmly quiet, even in her presence."

"You will not see him," said the Curé.

In another moment I was kneeling by her couch. And if before I saw her face I had longed to say—"Could you have loved a man who would have made you a lady, and sheltered you from the rough wind and the cold hand of poverty and ill?" I longed no more to utter such wild and selfish words, when her dying eyes looked gratefully into mine, and she thanked me humbly for the kindness I had done her.

Ah! then I sank down into the depths of humiliation. Kindness? She, an angel, just going to heaven, thanking me, a poor worm on earth, for kindness!

What was it? A little food—a little wine. Great heavens! what poor creatures we are, when we exact gratitude for such puny gifts as these! Gifts given to angels—for such, many times and oft, are the poor and dying, though we know it not.

Then she put out her hand to me; but I, looking at her through a mist of tears, did not see it till her slender fingers touched mine, and drew me down towards her.

"Forgive Antoine," she whispered, and a deep blush came over her face. "I loved him always. I never loved but him."

Then I saw that that dream of mine, hidden in my heart, had reached her, I know not how, and thrown a shade of fear and sorrow in her soul for me.

"God bless you, Eulalie," I said, "I forgive him. There is not a shadow of anger in my heart against him now."

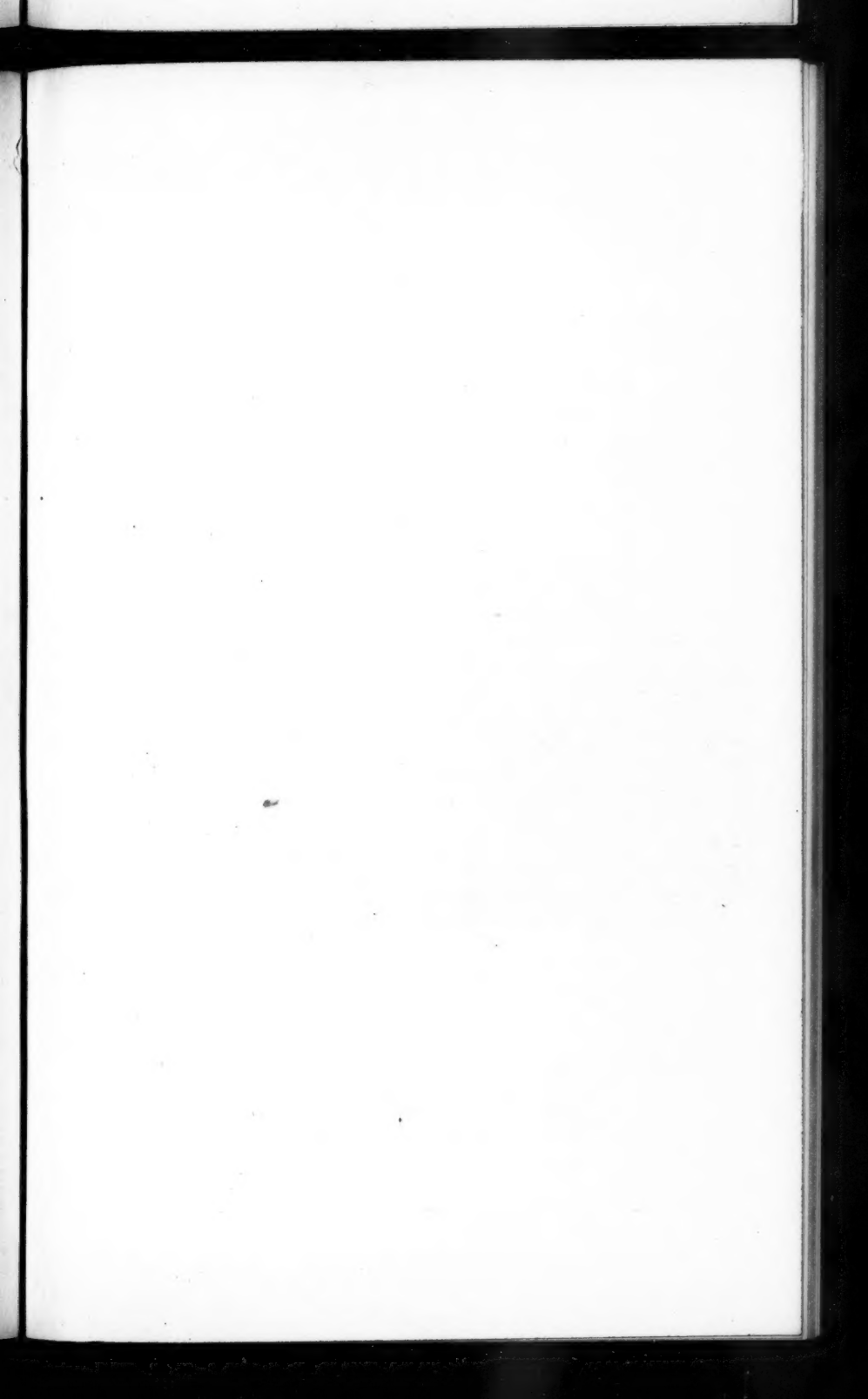
The next day she died. And in the evening, as I was going down to the Curé's, feeling it not good for me to be alone, I saw a lonely man in the cemetery digging a grave. I drew near to him.

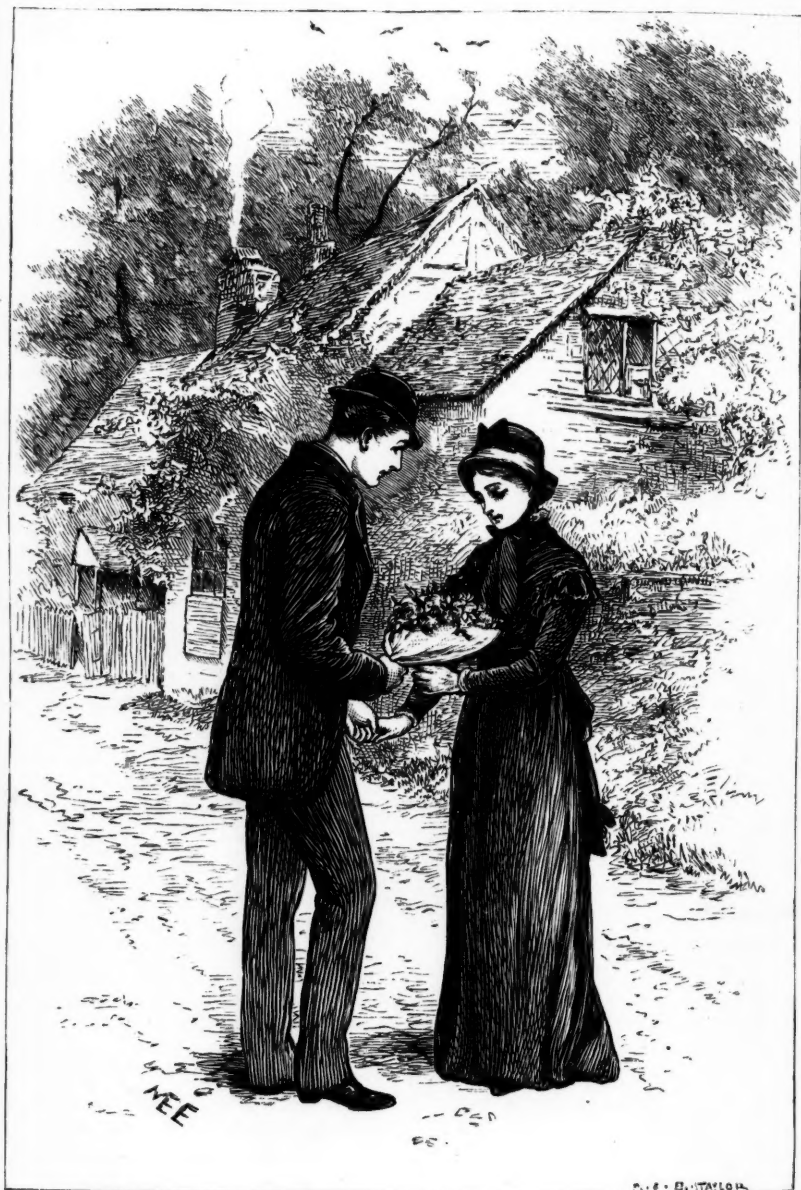
It was Antoine, the blacksmith. He was digging the grave for Eulalie, his wife. His face was ghastly white, and haggard with many tears, and as his stalwart and strong arms raised the earth and cast it aside, sobs rent his bosom, till, trembling in his anguish, he rested on his spade, and bowed his head upon his clasped hands.

Then I stole away, and told the Curé what I had seen.

"Yes," he answered, "Antoine had chosen this dreadful task as a penance. He would dig the grave himself, he said, for the heart he had broken."







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"AT THAT MOMENT HE FELT THAT HE LOVED HER VERY DEARLY."